Fact Sheet

Potato salad and picnic baskets

Warm weather and sunny weekends almost beg for picnics and grilling out, but as food heats up in summer temperatures, bacteria multiply rapidly. Protect your picnic guests from bacteria and foodborne illness.

Plan Ahead

Place cold food in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be stored at 40°F or below to prevent bacteria from multiplying. Raw meat can be packed frozen, but should be wrapped or placed in sealed bags to prevent juices from dripping. Separate raw meat from ready-to-eat foods like fruit, vegetables, deviled eggs and potato salad. Consider packing drinks in a separate cooler so that frequently opening it to grab drinks won't expose meat and other perishables to warm outdoor air temperatures.

Cook and Serve

Wash your hands and surfaces before preparing food. Be sure to cook meat to a safe internal temperature using a food thermometer. Hamburger should be cooked to at least 160°F and chicken breasts to 165°F. Keep hot foods hot until you are ready to eat, and then serve them on a clean plate with clean utensils. Cold foods should be kept cold in the cooler until ready to serve. Keep food from falling into the temperature "Danger Zone" between 40° F and 140°F for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if the outdoor temperature is above 90°F). Bacteria multiply very rapidly when food is in the danger zone, and can cause foodborne illness.

Packing Up

Don't let food sit out in the sun. Keep coolers in the shade, and pack up leftovers as soon as you finish eating. They should be placed back in the ice chest, and then refrigerated as soon as you return home. Throw away any perishable food that has been out of temperature for more than two hours (or 1 hour if the outdoor temperature is above 90°F).

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