



News Column for week of May 21, 2018

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Keep Your Barbecue Safe for Everyone to Enjoy

For many people, the Memorial Day Holiday marks the “official” beginning of summer and means enjoying time outdoors and firing up the grill. Elizabeth Boyle, meat safety and quality specialist for K-State Research and Extension, said barbecuing requires some safety practices to ensure everyone enjoys the food and the summer grilling season.

1. Avoid cross-contamination

Boyle's first food safety tip is to avoid cross-contamination. Frequently washing hands is necessary.

"Washing your hands becomes important, especially with grilling," Boyle said. "We are taking food outside, handling door knobs, handling tongs, handling raw meat and poultry, and handling fresh fruits and vegetables."

If you don't have a sink readily available or soap and water on hand, at least use hand sanitizing wipes to try to decontaminate your hands, she said.

Also make sure to decontaminate utensils and cooking supplies. Common items that could lead to cross-contamination include cutting boards, knives and other tableware, and meat thermometers.

Boyle said to use separate cutting boards for meat and produce, or thoroughly wash the cutting board after each use with soap and hot water. This prevents uncooked meat juices from contaminating fresh, uncooked produce.

Between checking temperatures of meat using a meat thermometer, make sure if the product hasn't reached necessary doneness to wash the stem off in hot soapy water and rinse it before checking the temperature of the meat again, she said.

2. Cook meat to appropriate temperatures.

For many, marinating meat comes before grilling. Boyle said to make sure to marinate at refrigeration temperatures.

"We want to keep foods out of the danger zone which is between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit," she said. "Foods can't be in that temperature range for more than two hours. Otherwise, we have concerns not only with spoilage but also with potential growth of microorganisms that cause foodborne illness."

To make sure that the food you are serving is safe after grilling, use a meat thermometer, Boyle said. Most retail stores offer inexpensive meat thermometers and many different versions to fit your preference.

"For a hamburger patty, I would insert (the thermometer) about an inch into the patty so I get my tip to the center," she said. "Don't take (the temperature) from the top down but from the side."

For ground beef, lamb or pork, cook that product to an internal temperature of 160 F. Whole cuts such as steaks and chops should be cooked to at least 145 F. All poultry products need to reach at least 165 F.

"We can't rely on color," Boyle said. "Different factors play into meat color, and those can lead to a condition called persistent pink, where even though the product has reached 160 degrees (F), the meat is still pink in the middle. There's also a condition called premature browning, where the meat can turn brown at 140 degrees, not be safe but look like it's done."

3. Wash produce, not meat.

When you're working with produce, make sure you wash it before eating, Boyle said. This prevents potential microorganisms on the surface of produce from making people sick.

Make sure to scrub melons such as cantaloupes and watermelons with a vegetable brush. Wash your leafy lettuce, head lettuce, and other fruits and vegetables under running water. Then, dry off produce before putting it on a clean cutting board and cutting it.

Some consumers think they need to wash their meat before they grill it or before they get it ready for marinating, Boyle said, but unlike fresh produce, you do not need to wash meat products.

"Our modern harvesting practices have washing procedures inherently associated with them, so when you buy your meat at the grocery store, there's no need for you to wash it," Boyle said. "Even if you did wash it, what could result is a lot of cross contamination in your sink area and on your counters from the splatters or the drops that aspirate from hitting the meat surface."

4. Store leftovers properly.

Usually barbecues with family and friends mean everyone is having fun and doing activities together, Boyle said, but make sure the meal and any leftovers don't sit out longer than two hours. Make sure to package up leftovers, and put them in the refrigerator or cooler with ice or ice packs to keep them out of that temperature danger zone.

More information about food safety for grilling can be found at the Southwind Extension offices or by contacting Kathy at kmcewan@ksu.edu or by phone at 620-365-2242.

