

Family Gatherings: At Home Safe Food Handling

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One of the food safety steps that is often the most forgotten at outdoor picnics is also one of the most simple. Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee said while home cooks and BBQ aficionados often remember to cook foods to the required internal temperature and store food appropriately, they sometimes derail their party by not washing their hands.

“When packing for picnics,” said Blakeslee, who also is coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for food science, “use a bottle of water and add soap so it is ready to use. Another idea is to take wet washcloths with soap to wash your hands.”

Hand wipes or hand sanitizer is best used after washing hands to remove visible dirt, she added. Hands may need to be washed several times during the prep and cooking stages, especially after handling raw foods.

Washing hands is one of the four core food safety steps of clean, separate, cook and chill. Here are some other tips:

*Plan ahead. Bring such items as a food thermometer, cooler chest with ice, clean utensils, storage containers for leftovers, disposable dinnerware, paper towels and trash bags.

*Thaw food in the refrigerator or cook from the frozen state. Don’t thaw meat on the counter overnight or outside in the sun. Don’t partially cook meat and poultry ahead of time.

*Wash hands when you arrive at the picnic site. Don’t handle food until you’ve cleaned up. If running water is not available, use the supplies you’ve brought with you before and after touching food.

*Don’t leave food out in the sun. At the picnic, keep the cooler in the shade. Serve food quickly from the cooler and then return it soon afterward. In weather above 90 degrees F, food shouldn’t sit out of the cooler for more than an hour. Consider separate coolers for cold foods and hot foods.

Outdoor picnics are fun events, but handling food safely helps keep the fun in the event, too. Keep cold foods cold – below 40 F – by using ice or ice packs, for example. Keep hot foods hot – above 140 F – by grilling and eating immediately, or using insulated carriers to keep food hot. Use a separate cooler for beverages on ice.

Another tip is to pack a food thermometer to check cold and hot foods often for safety.

The recommended internal temperature to assure the safety of common foods include:

Steaks, chops – 145 F.

Ground meat – 160 F.

All poultry – 165 F.

Enjoy your family gatherings and keep these safe food handling tips in mind for the health of your family members. For further information on food safety practices such as for the National Restaurant Association Nationally Accredited ServSafe Food Handler Certification, please contact Sandy Haggard, Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health Agent, Southwind District, SJHaggard@ksu.edu or 620.365.2242.

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