



Food Safety and Inspection Service

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News Release

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Though Memorial Day Activities Are Different This Year, Food Safety Remains a Priority

WASHINGTON, MAY 21, 2020 — Every year, millions of Americans commemorate Memorial Day to honor the sacrifices so many have made to protect our country. This holiday weekend might not be like past years, so while we keep public health recommendations in mind, let's not forget food safety practices to prevent foodborne illnesses.

“Memorial Day is the unofficial start of the summer season,” says Dr. Mindy Brashears, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Under Secretary for Food Safety. “This summer may look different than most, and you can protect your family from foodborne illness and other illnesses during your summer celebrations by avoiding large gatherings, practicing social distancing, and washing your hands regularly.”

For those who choose to celebrate outdoors, USDA recommends the following food safety tips to keep your outdoor activities safe and fun this Memorial Day weekend.

Remember the Summer Season

Summer weather can be hot and humid, which means your food won't stay safe as long as it could indoors. When the temperature outside is above 90°F, perishable food such as meat and poultry, dips and cold salads, or cut fruits and vegetables are only safe out on the table for one hour. According to a recent USDA survey, nearly 85 percent of participants said they don't nest cold foods in ice when they serve it. Keeping cold foods cold is an important step to keep food safe and healthy, so store them on ice, in coolers, or in your fridge and freezer.

In the same survey, 66 percent of participants indicated they did not keep their cooked foods, like burgers and hot dogs, warm after cooking. Just like cold foods, hot perishable foods should be kept warm (above 140°F) until they're eaten. You can easily do this by moving these items to the side of your grill away from the main heat source, rather than taking them off the grill entirely. Make sure your grilled meat and poultry reach a safe internal temperature first by using a food thermometer.

Know Your Outdoor Environment

You may have everything you need in an indoor kitchen to be food safe, but the same may not be true for your outdoor grill or other food preparation space.

“Now that summer is finally here, many are choosing to move their meals outside,” says USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Administrator Paul Kiecker. “Prepare your outdoor spaces so they are food safe. If you won't have running water, use hand sanitizer or moist towelettes to keep your hands clean before, during, and after food preparation.”

It's most effective to use warm, soapy water to wash hands for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food. If you have to use hand sanitizer, make sure to choose one that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Using moist towelettes and paper towels can help to clean and sanitize any cutting boards or utensils while you're outside or away from your kitchen. Keeping hands and surfaces clean when handling food will help lessen the spread of germs and foodborne illness causing bacteria.

With these tips in mind, it's easy to avoid foodborne illness and other illnesses during your summer celebrations. For any food safety questions this summer, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or chat live at ask.usda.gov from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. Remember food safety to have a safe and happy Memorial Day weekend!

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