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Summer food safety tips

Easy steps to fight against foodborne illness

Ithaca, Stanton St. Johns- With summer well on its way and backyard barbeques and family picnics in full swing, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) would like to reinforce the importance of proper food handling.

Each year, roughly one out of six Americans get sick from foodborne illness, with the most common types caused by the bacteria *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E coli*, and by a group of viruses known as Norovirus. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea that last on average of 24 to 48 hours, and often mistaken for the “24 hour flu.”

To help keep your family safe, follow these four steps when handling and preparing food:

Step One – Clean

Wash hands and surfaces often to avoid the spread of bacteria.

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food, and after handling raw meats or poultry, using the bathroom, touching pets or changing diapers.
- Always wash raw fruits and vegetables in clean water.

Step Two – Separate

Keep raw meats and poultry separate from cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination.

- When you pack a cooler, wrap uncooked meats and poultry separately, and put them on the bottom to prevent raw juices from dripping onto other foods. A separate cooler for storing raw food is preferred.
- Wash all plates, utensils, and cutting boards that touched or held raw meat or poultry before using them again for cooked foods.

Step Three – Cook

Make sure you kill harmful bacteria by thoroughly cooking food.

- Visual cues, like color, are not a guarantee that food is safe. Don't guess! Use a digital instant-read food thermometer to check when meat and poultry are safe to eat. Cooked foods are safe to eat when internal temperatures are:

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- 155° F for 15 seconds for ground beef
- 145° F for 15 seconds for beef steak
- 165° F for 15 seconds for poultry
- 145° F for 15 seconds for pork chops/steak

Step Four - Chill

Keep cold food cold.

- Perishable foods normally kept in the refrigerator must be kept in a cooler with freezer packs or ice to keep the temperature at or near 40° F.
- Put leftovers back in the refrigerator or cooler as soon as you are done eating.
- The simple rule is: When in doubt, throw it out!

If you experience foodborne illness symptoms, it is important not to prepare food for others and to contact MMDHDs Environmental Health Division at 989-831-3607 in Montcalm County, 989-875-1002 in Gratiot County and 989-227-3110 in Clinton County with any questions.

For additional information on proper food handling, visit the United States Department of Agriculture website at www.usda.gov.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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