

As Weather Gets Warmer, Risks Rise For Food-borne Illness

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### **Picnics: Don't Run the Risk of Foodborne Illness**

Everyone in your family is excited....you are off to the beach for a boating party which always includes a variety of foods prepared at home and transported to the beach. When you arrive, parents immediately begin to unload the coolers and set up the feast. However, when the dinner bell is rung, the children and their friends are midway through a heated beach volleyball game, one that is not to be interrupted. Everyone's competitive nature is peaked and the fun is evident. Parents pull up their lawn chairs and become engrossed in cheering for their team. **A Disaster in the making.....**consider the food that has been left out while the game continues. Although the families may have followed good techniques to this point, all may be lost during the volleyball competition. What about the mayonnaise-based potato salad, the sliced cold cuts, and the cream pies?

It is a good time to review food safety rules and apply them to this outdoor setting. Do you remember how long food can be out of a cooled environment? Bacteria multiply rapidly between 40° to 140° F. To keep food out of this "danger zone", keep cold food cold and hot food hot. Don't let food sit out for more than two hours. On a hot day (90° or higher), food should not sit out for more than one hour. If this family decides to run to the water following their meal, chances are that the food will not get put away. Instead, it is left out as a late afternoon snack. Unfortunately, in the time that has elapsed since their meal, the opportunity for a genuine risk has increased. According to the FDA, over 200,000 people in the United States become ill with a foodborne illness each day, with 14 of these cases resulting in death. Those who are especially vulnerable are pregnant women, newborns, older adults and people with their immune systems weakened by cancer treatments, AIDS, diabetes, and other causes.

Have you heard these sayings? "If it tastes okay, it is safe to eat." "I sampled it and did not get sick. It must be safe." Believing these myths can be deadly.

The new rules for your kitchen in or away from home are Keep it **Clean**; Keep it **Separate**; **Cook it** to the correct internal temperature; and **Chill it** within the suggested safe time period. Although these terms seem self-explanatory, **Separate** may need clarification. **Separate** refers to cross-contamination which can cause foodborne illness. It is the transfer of harmful bacteria to a food from other foods, cutting boards, utensils, surfaces, or hands. At a picnic site, don't be tempted to return the grilled hamburgers to the same plate that previously held raw food. The juices will contaminate the cooked meat. Do not cut the onions for the hamburgers on the same cutting board that you used to prepare the meat unless it has been thoroughly sanitized.

Foodborne illness is not something to take lightly. As the weather gets warmer, greater chance of contracting it increases. Have a safe beach party.

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, gender or national origin.