Fire up that grill and bring out the food! Summer is almost here, and what better time could there be for cooking outdoors? Because warm temperatures can cause bacteria to multiply quickly, we have to be especially careful to make sure to handle foods properly when we are out in the heat. We want to stop foodborne illness before it stops our summer fun. Here are some hot tips to help you grill your foods safely.

- **KEEP CLEAN!** Keeping clean can stop the spread of harmful bacteria or viruses to foods. Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before handling food and after handling raw products like meats, poultry, fish, seafood and eggs. Use clean utensils. Keep work surfaces clean. Outdoors, this may mean taking along sanitary wipes to clean hands and surfaces; as well as tablecloths, paper towels or foil to cover work areas.

- **KEEP SEPARATE!** Raw products may have bacteria on them. Keep raw products away from foods that are ready to be eaten. Have plenty of extra utensils and platters on hand when grilling. Always place grilled foods onto clean plates using clean utensils. If grilled foods are placed back onto platters with raw juices, harmful bacteria can contaminate the cooked food. If you are using a marinade or basting sauce and want to serve it as an accompaniment to the cooked meat reserve a portion in advance. If the basting sauce and/or marinade used while cooking the meat is served with the finished product, bacteria may be added back to the cooked food.

- **KEEP OUT OF THE DANGER ZONE!** Keep foods out of the temperature danger zone of between 40° and 140° F. Cold foods should stay cold (at or below 40° F). Frozen meats should be thawed in the refrigerator ahead of time, thawed under cold water or thawed in the microwave oven just before cooking. Don’t thaw or marinate foods at room temperature. After preparation and cooking, foods should be served immediately. If not, cool the food quickly (to 40° F or below) or keep the food hot (above 140° F) for serving. For outdoor buffets, put out small containers of each food and replace them often with fresh batches in clean dishes.

- **KEEP COOKING!** Be sure to cook foods until they are thoroughly done. Use a meat thermometer or a stem-type instant read thermometer to check to see when foods have reached a safe degree of doneness. For beef or pork, 160° F is medium; 170° F is well done. Ground beef, whether in patties or a loaf, must reach at least 160° F. Poultry should reach 180° F, or if ground, 165° F. The color of meat is not an accurate way to tell when a product is done. When grilling burgers, use a thermometer. If the burger has not reached 160° F, KEEP COOKING!

Make your summertime a fun time. Let these “hot off the press” tips keep your “hot off the grill” foods safe.
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