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Part 5 of 14
 Next Topic: Animal Bites

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Serve up Good Times, Not Food Poisoning

Yakima, WA – Memorial Day weekend marks the start of the grilling and picnic season. Most people are planning guest lists, location, activities and menu for their holiday events. Very few are thinking about how to keep their food safe to eat. By following basic food safety rules this weekend, residents can serve up a good time, without a side of food poisoning.

“Seeing family, friends, and a table of mouth-watering food is what makes picnics great,” comments Dave Cole, Environmental Health Specialist with the Yakima Health District. “It’s what you can’t see that might make you sick.”

Germs that cause foodborne illness, like *Salmonella* and *E. coli*, can’t be seen with the naked eye. They can be on/in raw meats and on unwashed fruits and vegetables. They can be on surfaces that people touch like doors and drawer handles. They also come from people who are sick. These germs get on foods when they are grown, processed, and/or prepared. However, they can usually be killed or removed from foods with proper cooking and washing. Some release toxins or poisons into the foods as they grow. These poisons also cause illness if ingested. The poisons cannot be removed or “killed”, even with heat.

Foodborne illness occurs when a person eats food with living germs or their toxins on/in it. Germs spread by sick food workers and poor hand washing cause the most foodborne illnesses in Washington. Not cooking foods thoroughly, spreading germs from one food or surface to another, and not keeping foods hot or cold are also frequent causes. Using these basic food safety practices can prevent most foodborne illness.

NEVER PREPARE FOOD FOR OTHERS IF YOU’RE SICK. --throwing up, diarrhea (the “runs”)

If you’re sick, leave the cooking to someone who isn’t.

WASH HANDS OFTEN.

Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm running water before handling food, right after handling raw meats, and any other time hands get dirty. Use hand sanitizer according to instructions if water is not available. Gloves can also be worn after hands are washed. NEVER use irrigation water to wash hands, dishes, or utensils.

COOK RAW MEATS THOROUGHLY.

Visual cues can be used to *estimate* if meats are cooked well enough: juices from beef and hamburger should run clear (not red or pink); chicken and pork meat should be white (not pink); and fish should flake easily with a fork.

Using a food thermometer is the only way to be sure meats are cooked properly, though. Meats are done when a food thermometer inserted into the middle (but not out the other side) reads:

- Pre-cooked hot dogs: 140°F
- Fish, beef, pork: 145°F
- Ground beef patties (hamburgers) or sausage: 155°F
- Chicken: 165°F

Metal stem food thermometers can be bought at many large retail stores for around five dollars.

KEEP HOT FOODS HOT AND COLD FOODS COLD.

Use crock pots, electric skillets, or the grill to keep hot foods above 140°F. Keep cold foods on ice so their temperature stays below 41°F. Never leave foods at room temperature for more than two hours, even during preparation. Keep melons cold after they're cut.

DON'T SPREAD GERMS FROM ONE FOOD SURFACE TO THE NEXT.

Thoroughly wash plates, cutting boards, and utensils that raw meat has touched BEFORE re-using them for food that won't be cooked (salads, fruits, etc). Also wash plates used to season raw meat before using them to take cooked meat off the grill.

WASH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES WELL.

REFRIGERATE LEFTOVERS IMMEDIATELY.

"The most common question I get at picnics is if food is safe to eat after it's sat out awhile," remarks Ryan Ibach, Food Team Lead at YHD. "If food that needs to be kept hot or cold has sat out for more than two hours, it should be thrown away. When in doubt, throw it out."

Signs of foodborne illness start within a few hours to a few days after eating bad food. The most common signs are throwing up and diarrhea. People might also have fever, cramping, bloody diarrhea, and headache. Many foodborne illnesses go away without medical care after a few days. Some people, like the very young, very old, and people with suppressed immune systems may get serious, life-threatening illness. Seek medical attention right away for anyone who can't keep fluids or food down.

Foodborne illness happens, but using the food safety tips listed above will help minimize the risks to you and your guests.

Visit <http://www.yakimapublichealth.org> or <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/food/factsheets.html> for more food safety tips. The Yakima Health District's Environmental Health Help Desk can also be reached at (509) 249-6508. To read about additional topics in the YHD's *Spring & Summer Safety Series*, visit www.yakimapublichealth.org.

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