

HealthWatch: When Good Food Goes Bad

Each year, newspapers have numerous examples of people getting sick at picnics or other outdoor events where food is served. These incidents can cause very painful symptoms and ruin the memory of a wonderful outing. But a few precautions when eating outdoors during hot weather can keep you and your family and friends safe and healthy:

- * Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Cold items, such as potato salad, should be kept in coolers packed with ice. Hot items should be kept in an insulated container until served.

- * Never leave food sitting out longer than the meal period. This time should not exceed 1-2 hours.

- * It's not a good idea to keep leftovers; however, if you decide to keep them, place them in a cooler filled with ice immediately after the meal.

- * Keep your picnic simple. Avoid preparing food at the picnic site other than what you will cook on the grill.

- * Cook all meat items thoroughly. Pay special attention to hamburger patties. They should be cooked until there is no pink in the middle and the juices run clear.

- * Always cover the food during service to protect it from crawling and flying insects.

- * Never serve food with your hands. Tongs, spoons and other utensils should be used.

- * Wash your hands before handling foods and always be sure to wash your hands after using the bathroom.

Bacteria cause most contamination and food borne illnesses, and it only takes warmth, moisture, nutrients and time for bacteria to grow and multiply. It takes one bacterium just 10 minutes to split into two and nine hours to become 100 million bacteria. Therefore, if you eliminate the chance for bacteria to grow, you will eliminate the risk for food poisoning.



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