

Practice food safety to prevent being sidelined

By Carol Burtneck, RD, LDN, and Deborah Ward, MBA, RD, LDN



Whether you are barbecuing, picnicking, or purchasing prepared foods from a concession stand, mobile food truck or food cart, it is important to be smart about food safety. These situations present challenges for handling food safely because bacteria grows rapidly in warm temperatures and can cause people to become sick. Knowing how to prevent foodborne illness and avoid risky foods will help

keep you from being sidelined. Here are some simple food safety basics to practice:

- Keep cold foods cold, hot foods hot.
- When in doubt, throw it out!
- Wash your hands before cooking or eating foods.

When purchasing prepared foods at a concession stand, mobile food truck or cart, there are a few additional tips to remember:

- Check to see the stand has a current license or permit prominently displayed. This indicates the site has regular health inspections.
- Observe if the food handlers are washing their hands and wearing disposable gloves.
- Make sure the person handling money is first washing their hands or putting on disposable gloves before handling any food.
- Look to ensure those preparing food wear hairnets or hats.
- Be sure food temperatures are what you expect—hot foods hot, cold foods cold. In other words, the potato salad is not warm.
- Take note that the food looks, smells and tastes okay. When in doubt, throw it out!

Although not often thought of as a food safety concern, grocery shopping can unintentionally put food at risk depending upon the amount of groceries you need to purchase, the day and time you shop and what you purchase. Perishable foods, like frozen and refrigerated meats, milk and eggs should be added to your shopping cart last. This way, you will not run the chance of refreezing thawed foods or having foods in an unsafe temperature range by the time you arrive home.

Continued on next page



Continued from page 3

Another time to be mindful of food temperatures is after a meal. Refrigerate leftover food promptly, especially those that contain meat or dairy products. Food left out for more than two hours is not safe to eat and should be discarded. Leftovers that have been off the grill for less than one hour can be safely refrigerated, or packed in ice if you're not home.

Bacteria multiplies quickly between 41°F and 140°F. Foods kept in this temperature range are considered to be in the “*danger zone.*”

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Department of Food Safety, refrigerators should be set to maintain a temperature of 40°F or colder. Some refrigerators have built-in thermometers to measure the internal temperature. Refrigerators without this feature can be monitored with an appliance thermometer available at most hardware and appliance stores. This is especially important in the event of a power outage. If power goes out, **DO NOT** open the refrigerator or freezer door. This will help foods stay cold until the power is restored. Once it is restored, check the refrigerator thermometer. If it is still 40°F or colder, the food is safe. Foods held at temperatures above 40°F for more than two hours should not be consumed.

Potato salad is a favorite American food served at potlucks, tailgate parties and post game celebrations. However, foods made with mayonnaise, tartar sauce, Thousand Island dressing, aioli (flavored mayonnaise) or even added cooked eggs may pose a risk for bacteria and foodborne illness. Also, food at get-togethers is usually set out for everyone to help themselves. This poses a serious risk especially in the warm weather because foods can reach temperatures above 40°F quickly. To be safe, return foods to the refrigerator or cooler filled with ice after foods are prepared or served. If you are unsure how long a food has been unrefrigerated—throw it out! It is better to be safe than risk getting a foodborne illness such as Listeriosis and Salmonella.



Foodborne illnesses can be caused by eating food or drinking beverages contaminated by harmful bacteria or other germs. Foods most at risk include raw or undercooked eggs, raw or rare meat, raw dairy products (raw or unpasteurized milk, some soft cheeses such as Camembert and Brie, raw or undercooked molluscan shellfish (clams, oysters, etc.) and raw fish/seafood (sushi, tuna, carpaccio, etc.). In addition, heat deli meats, hot dogs and sausages until steaming hot prior to eating.

Continued on next page

Continued from page 4

To avoid spreading harmful bacteria, **ALWAYS** wash your hands with soap before cooking or eating foods, after touching raw foods, after using the restroom and changing diapers, and after handling pets. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Listeriosis affects some 2,500 individuals each year of which 500 will die. The elderly, young children, pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals are more susceptible or at a greater risk for getting Listeriosis.

Even if you refrigerate your food and take other precautions mentioned earlier, it still is possible for food to develop bacteria and mold if stored beyond a safe length of time. The following guide developed by the CDC is a quick reference to help you know how long you can store food safely in your refrigerator at or below 40°F. This is only a guide so remember, when in doubt—THROW IT OUT!

Safe Storage Times	Foods
1 to 2 days	Ground meats, stew meats, fresh poultry, raw/uncooked sausage, fresh fish and shellfish, leftovers
3 to 4 days	Fresh beef, veal, lamb or pork, ham fully cooked (slices or half) , opened packaged lunch meats, salads (egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni) store cooked dinners and entrees, casseroles, gravy, broth or soup, meats in gravy or broth, patties and nuggets, cooked egg dishes (quiche, strata, soufflé)
1 week	Smoked breakfast links or patties, whole ham fully cooked, opened package of hot dogs,

If you remember to follow these food safety tips, you and your family are sure to enjoy meals at home or away. For more information on storing food safely go to the USDA website at www.fsis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Refrigeration_&_Food_Safety/index.asp#13/ and the DuPage County Health Department website: www.dupagehealth.org/warm-weather-food-safety-tips/.

