

Don't let food-borne illness spoil your barbecue fun

The summer traditionally begins the outdoor grilling season, but did you know that more than half of Americans now cook outdoors year round? Whether you're grilling in the sunshine or while the cold winds are blowing, it's important to follow food safety guidelines to prevent food-borne illness. These tips will protect you and your family whenever you grill outdoors:

- **Marinate foods only in the refrigerator, never on a counter or outdoors.** If using some of the marinade as a sauce after cooking, reserve the amount you need separately. Don't reuse marinade from raw foods.
- **Keep foods cold if transporting.** Use ice or frozen gel packs in coolers to keep cold foods at 40°F or below. Keep coolers out of direct sunlight. Avoid opening the lid too often to keep warm air from entering. Store beverages in a separate cooler since you're likely to open a beverage cooler more frequently.
- **Cook partially precooked food immediately on the grill.** This will ensure that any bacteria that is present is destroyed.
- **Cook food thoroughly.** You can't be sure by the way the food looks or feels that it's reached the required temperature to kill bacteria. Use a food thermometer. Below are the safe minimum temperatures for foods:
 - Whole poultry, poultry pieces, and ground poultry: 165°F
 - Ground beef: 160°F
 - Beef, pork, lamb and veal (steaks, roasts, and chops): 145°F. Allow food to rest at least three minutes after grilling.
 - Fish: 145°F

Shrimp, lobster and crab should be cooked until opaque. Cook clams, oysters, and mussels until the shells are open.

- **Don't cross-contaminate.** Keep raw meats, poultry and fish wrapped securely to keep their juices from contaminating other foods that will be eaten raw. Don't reuse platters and utensils used for raw foods with cooked foods. Wash everything first with hot water and soap before using again.
- **Check grilled foods for foreign objects before serving.** Although uncommon, people have gotten seriously injured and ill after eating food containing wire brush bristles left behind on the grill after cleaning. If you use a cleaning brush, inspect the grill surface for any left-over bristles before cooking. Use a moist cloth or towel to clean the grill.

With a little precaution, your plans for outdoor picnics and barbecues can be both healthy and fun.