



## SUMMER FOOD SAFETY

### The Issue

The risk of foodborne illnesses increases during the summer when temperatures are warmer and people are more likely to be cooking outside at picnics, barbecues, and on camping trips. You can minimize your family's risk of food poisoning by following some simple guidelines about food safety.

### Background

The risk of foodborne illnesses increases in the summer for two main reasons. First, summer weather is often hot and humid, and the kinds of bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses, such as Salmonella and E. coli O157:H7, multiply quickly in warm, moist conditions. The "danger zone" for the rapid growth of bacteria is from 4° C to 60° C (40° F to 140° F).

Second, summer brings an increase in outdoor activities. When you cook or eat outside at picnics or on camping trips, you don't always have easy access to the safety features found in kitchens, such as refrigeration and washing facilities.

It's always important to use safe practices when handling and preparing food. However, there are extra steps you can take to minimize the additional risks of foodborne illnesses in the summertime.

### Health Canada and Food Safety

Health Canada sets policies and standards governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) enforces the policies and standards, and ensures that all necessary warnings are released quickly to the Canadian public.

As a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Health Canada also participates in public awareness campaigns about safe food practices. One example is a program called Fight BAC™, which encourages Canadian consumers to think of food safety at every step of the food handling process, from shopping for groceries to re-heating leftovers.

### Minimize Your Risk

The government plays a role, but you are your family's last line of defense when it comes to food safety. Here are some guidelines to help you Fight BAC™ in the summertime.

#### Clean:

Wash hands and surfaces often to avoid the spread of bacteria.

- Wash your hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food, and after handling raw meats or poultry, using the bathroom, changing diapers, or touching pets.

- When camping, or going on a picnic, find out if there will be a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning, or pack disposable wipes and/or sanitizing lotions and paper towels.
- Take clean plastic bags or containers to store leftover food.
- Always wash raw fruits and vegetables in clean water. You cannot tell whether foods carry surface bacteria by the way they look, smell, or taste.

**Separate:**

Keep raw foods separate from cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination.

- When you pack a cooler for an outing, wrap raw meats and poultry securely, and put them on the bottom to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods.
- Wash all plates, utensils, and cutting boards that touched or held raw meat or poultry before using them again for cooked foods.

**Cook:**

Make sure you kill harmful bacteria by cooking food until it reaches the proper temperature.

- Don't guess! Take a digital instant-read food thermometer along to check when meat and poultry are safe to eat. The safe temperatures for cooked foods are:
- 71° C (160° F) for ground beef
- 74° C (165° F) for leftover food

- 85° C (185° F) for whole poultry
- If you have to check more than once, clean the thermometer before using it again.
- Eat cooked food while it's still hot. Remember, bacteria can grow when food is allowed to cool down slowly.

**Chill:**

Keep cold food cold. Letting food sit at unsafe temperatures puts you at risk for foodborne illnesses.

- Perishable foods that are normally in the refrigerator, such as luncheon meats, cooked meat, chicken, and potato or pasta salads, must be kept in an insulated cooler with freezer packs or blocks of ice to keep it at 4° C (40° F) or below.
- Refrigerate or freeze food the day before you pack it for a trip.
- When packing a cooler, put your meat or poultry on the bottom, and then pack food in reverse order, so that the foods packed on top are the ones you expect to use first.
- Keep the cooler in the coolest part of the car, and place it in shade or shelter, away from direct sunlight. Keep the cooler closed as much as possible.
- Consider using one cooler for beverages and another for perishable foods, since the beverage cooler is likely to be opened more frequently.
- Put leftovers back in the cooler as soon as you are finished eating.

- Discard all perishable foods once the ice or freezer packs in your cooler have melted. The simple rule is: When in doubt, throw it out.

**Need More Info?**

For more Fight BAC™ tips, visit: <http://www.canfightbac.org/english/indexe.shtml>.

For more information about Health Canada's Food Program visit: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment>

You can also find out more about food safety by visiting the Canadian Food Inspection Agency web site at: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca>

Smart Summer Fun <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/feature/summer/>

It's Your Health - Hamburger Disease <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/hamburger.html>