

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Barbeque! It's 'What's for Dinner'

(Coldwater, MI) Days are getting warmer, baseball season is in full swing, and Memorial Day is here—all signs that the summer cookout season is upon us. As you welcome summer in during your Memorial Day weekend barbecue this year, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you that safe grilling practices are the key to making your cookout a big hit with your guests.

"The recent recall of hamburger contaminated by E-Coli reinforces the need for everyone to practice safe grilling" says Steve Todd, Health Officer of the tri-county health department. "A food thermometer may be the most important ingredient for families and friends hosting cookouts over Memorial Day Weekend and throughout the summer." Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director states "Be sure to be safe this summer by practicing four basic food cooking and handling practices. By incorporating these practices, you can help assure your food is safe, as well as tasty!"

Clean: First things first—make sure you start with clean surfaces and clean hands. Be sure that you and your guests wash your hands before preparing or handling food. Hands should be washed with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Equally important are the surfaces that come in contact with raw and cooked foods—make sure they are clean before you start and are washed frequently.

Separate: Raw meats and poultry should be prepared separately from vegetables and cooked foods. As you chop meats and veggies, be sure to use separate cutting boards. Juices from raw meats can contain harmful bacteria that could spread to raw veggies and already cooked foods.

Cook: Never begin grilling without your most important tool—a food thermometer. According to Rebecca Burns “Color is not a reliable indicator of doneness. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often brown quickly and may appear done on the outside, but still may not have reached a safe minimum internal temperature to kill any harmful bacteria.” Pork, lamb, veal, and whole cuts of beef should be cooked to 145 °F as measured by a food thermometer placed in the thickest part of the meat, followed by a three-minute rest time before carving or consuming. Hamburgers and other ground beef should reach 160 °F. All poultry should reach a minimum temperature of 165 °F. Fish should be cooked to 145 °F. Fully cooked meats like hot dogs should be grilled to 135 °F or until steaming hot. Rebecca adds “As you take the cooked meats off the grill, be sure to place them on a clean platter, not on the dish that held them when they were raw. The juices left on the plate from raw meat can spread bacteria to safely cooked food.” If you prefer to prepare meats using a smoker, the temperature in the smoker should be maintained between 225 °F and 300 °F for safety. Be sure to use your food thermometer to be certain the food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature.

Chill: Keeping food at a safe temperature can be a concern at outdoor picnics and cookouts. Too often, food is prepared and left to sit out while guests munch over the course of several hours. Bacteria grow most rapidly between 41 °F and 135 °F, so perishable food should never sit out for more than two hours. If the temperature is over 90 °F—which is common in the summer—food shouldn't sit out more than one hour. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly and discard any food that has been out too long. It's important to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods can be kept hot on the grill and cold foods can be kept chilled with ice packs or ice sources in a cooler.

Summer gatherings are fun times and offer opportunities to enjoy family, friends and food. By following these simple practices, you can help assure that good memories are made and enjoyed by all. For more information about how to prepare foods safely, be sure to check out our website at www.bhsj.org.

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