

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tailgating Touchdowns for Food Safety!

Coldwater, MI. When it comes to football, defense matters. When it comes to planning a tailgate party, a good defense against foodborne illness matters even more. "This year, we're urging fans to follow the food safety play book at the tailgate parties they host," says Joseph Frazier, Environmental Health Coordinator with the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency. "Large gatherings can increase the chance of becoming ill, but by following these rules all fans can enjoy the game and their food, safely."

Illegal use of hands. Avoid penalties for "illegal use of hands." Unclean hands are one of the biggest culprits for spreading bacteria, and finger foods are especially vulnerable. Chefs and guests should wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. If running water is located far away from your tailgate, have sanitizing wipes available throughout the day. Also, be sure to clean eating surfaces often, and wash serving platters before replenishing them with fresh food.

Offsides. Think of your tailgate fare as two different teams—uncooked versus ready-to-eat foods. Prevent "encroachment" at all costs and keep each team in its own zone. The juices from raw meat can contain harmful bacteria that cross-contaminate other food. Use one cutting board for raw meat and poultry and another one for cutting veggies or foods that will not be cooked. If you use only one cutting board, wash it with hot soapy water after preparing each food item. As you take cooked meat off the grill, be sure to place it on a clean platter, not on the dish that held it while raw. The juices left on the plate from raw meat can spread harmful bacteria to safely cooked food.

Equipment violations and holding. Call a "time out" and use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry are safely cooked. Remember that internal temperature, not meat color, indicates doneness. To be sure harmful bacteria are killed, whole cuts of fresh beef and pork should be cooked to 145 °F followed by a three minute stand time, while ground beef and pork should be cooked to 160 °F (no rest time is necessary). Ground, whole, or pieces of poultry, as well as casseroles, should be cooked to 165 °F. Hotdogs and reheated deli meats should be cooked to 165 °F or until steaming hot.

"Holding" may be one of the most likely offenses your referee encounters during long football games. Never hold perishable foods out for more than two hours, or for more than one hour if the temperature is above 90 °F. Put leftovers back in the cooler promptly to block offensive bacteria from multiplying. When in doubt, throw it out of the game—and your tailgate.

False start. When it comes to foodborne illness, there is no opportunity for an instant replay. To avoid these infractions, make sure you understand the rules completely. One of the best resources available before kickoff is USDA's virtual representative, "Ask Karen," available at AskKaren.gov. Food safety coaches are available Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET on the "Ask Karen Chat" and by phone at the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). Recorded messages are available 24 hours a day.

To learn more about food safety and/or download any of our food-related FAQ sheets, visit the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's website at www.bhsj.org and click on the "Quick Info About Health Topics" button located in the top right corner.

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