

Food Safety

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Did you know that between 6.5 million to 33 million cases of food poisoning, or foodborne illness, happen in the U.S. every year? Or, that between 2-11% of us will be sick from food illness in a year? The symptoms of food borne illness are usually the same as a common cold or flu: fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. That's why the range of cases is so great! Many people get sick from food bacteria and don't even realize it.

As summer heats up, and we head to beach parties, barbeques, and picnics, the chances of meeting food bacteria greatly increase! How can you protect yourself? Here are four food safety steps from Fight BAC!, a national program to keep food safe from bacteria.

Clean.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water. It seems basic, and yet many of us forget to wash our hands after going to the bathroom, sneezing, or coughing.
2. Make sure to clean the surfaces well that food will be touching, like counter tops. Keep bags and purses off the counter.
3. Wash your kitchen towels frequently. Dirty dish cloths are a breeding ground for bacteria. Experts recommend using a clean one everyday.
4. Fresh fruits and vegetables should be washed under cold running water.

Separate.

1. Store raw beef, poultry and fish in the refrigerator on the bottom shelf so the juices don't drip onto other foods.
2. Use a separate cutting board for raw meat.
3. Never place cooked meat on the same plate that was used for raw meat. This is really important to remember when grilling outside.

Cook.

1. Use a meat thermometer to determine when meat is cooked thoroughly. Steaks should be cooked to 145°F, hamburgers to 160 °F, and chicken breasts to 170 °F.
2. Warm up leftovers to at least 165° F.
3. Avoid recipes that call for raw eggs.

Chill.

1. Keep your refrigerator temperature at less than 40 °F and freezer temperature at 0 °F.

2. Refrigerate groceries and leftovers within two hours.
3. Defrost foods in the refrigerator, under running water, or in the microwave. Never leave foods out on the counter to thaw.
4. Keep cold foods cold, especially at picnics. Store meats, dairy, and egg-containing foods in a cooler and keep them out of the sun.