PSA In Good Health: Avoid Food Poisoning this Summer

According to the CDC, approximately one in six Americans fall ill due to foodborne illness each year, with the onset of the summer months increasing your risk. Stay safe by following these important rules.

1. Make Your Marinade Tangy

Acidic marinades tend to slow the growth of bacteria on meat. Soak the meat properly and marinate in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Poultry and cubed meats shouldn't be marinated for more than two days, but it's okay to leave beef, pork, and lamb in the mixture for five days.

2. Think Temperature, Not Color for Burgers

Factors like how ground beef was packaged affect the meat's color as it cooks. Heat your burger to an internal temperature of 160°F—use a food thermometer. You can be more lenient about whole cuts of beef (if they haven't been "blade-tenderized" or had flavoring injected) because surface bacteria are destroyed through cooking. These cuts are safe if cooked to 145°.

3. Don't Count on "Pre-Washed"

Leafy greens (including bagged, pre-washed salad greens) are the riskiest food regulated by the FDA, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Thoroughly rinse leaves in cold water, use a salad spinner to remove most of the water, then blot dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. Refrigerate lettuce within two hours of buying, and use within a week.

4. Beware of the "Danger Zone"

The "danger zone" for bacteria reproduction is temperatures between 40°F and 140°F. Perishable products left at room temperature for more than two hours pose a health risk. If your grocery store commute is considerable or you have other errands to run, use an insulated bag or cooler to keep perishable groceries cold on your way home. Also, keep these products in the passenger compartment of your car instead of the trunk in warm temperatures, so that the air conditioner can help keep them cool.

5. Wash Plates and Platters Often

Make sure to wash any plates, platters, countertops, and cooking utensils that came in contact with raw products before using them to hold or serve cooked food. Use soapy hot water to wash them after each step of the preparation process to prevent bacteria from festering on surfaces and infecting your food down the line.

6. Defrost Safely

According to the Food Safety and Inspection Service, common defrosting methods such as leaving meat or chicken on the counter or using hot water are actually unsafe, because as soon as these foods become warmer than 40°F, bacteria can begin to multiply. Thaw safely in the refrigerator for 24 hours or using cold water. This method will require you to change out the water every 30 minutes to ensure it stays cold. You can also cook without thawing, though it will take about 50 percent longer than the cook time for thawed or fresh meat

7. Examine Jars and Cans

Canned or jarred products should keep for long periods of time because of the sterile environment created when they are processed. Bulging cans or jar lids may indicate that foods are under-processed and possibly contaminated, while dents, cracks, and loose lids indicate the vacuum has been broken and can also point to contamination.

8. Check Frozen Food Packaging

Frozen foods that have damaged packaging should not be purchased because any tears or evidence of being crushed could signify possible contamination. Packages with frost and ice crystals should also be avoided because they could mean the package has been thawed and refrozen, or is very old.

9. Leftovers

Food left out of refrigeration for more than two hours may not be safe to eat. When the temperature is above 90 °F (32 °C), food should not be left out for more than one hour. Play it safe and put leftover perishables back on ice once you finish eating so they do not spoil or become unsafe to eat. If you have any doubts, throw it out!

10. Wash Hands and Surfaces Often

Unwashed or improperly washed hands and surfaces can quickly spread germs and cause foodborne illness. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with warm, soapy water before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.

The effects of food poisoning can vary from person to person, even if everyone is exposed to the same contaminated foods. It really depends on how much of the germs each person consumed and how sensitive their bodies are to it. If you think you might have food poisoning, don't hesitate call your primary care or visit the Urgent Care center near you.

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