Foodborne Illness Peaks in Summer - Why?

Year after year, we hear and read the same advice: Handle food carefully in the summer because foodborne illness — also known as "food poisoning" — is more prevalent in warmer weather. Do foodborne illnesses increase during the summer months? If so, why?

Yes, foodborne illnesses do increase during the summer, and the answer appears to be twofold. First, there are the natural causes. Bacteria are present throughout the environment in soil, air, water, and in the bodies of people and animals. These microorganisms grow faster in the warm summer months. Most foodborne bacteria grow fastest at temperatures from 90 to 110 °F. Bacteria also need moisture to flourish, and summer weather is often hot and humid.

Given the right circumstances, harmful bacteria can quickly multiply on food to large numbers. When this happens, someone eating the food can get sick.

Second, there are the "people" causes for the upswing in summertime foodborne illnesses. Outside activities increase. More people are cooking outside at picnics, barbecues, and on camping trips. The safety controls that a kitchen provides — thermostat-controlled cooking, refrigeration, and washing facilities — are usually not available.

Fortunately, people seldom get sick from contaminated food because most people have a healthy immune system that protects them not only from harmful bacteria on food, but from other harmful organisms in the environment. At the same time, government agencies and food producers go to great lengths to keep food safe. And, of course, consumers can protect themselves at home with proper refrigeration and thorough cooking of perishable food.

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We know foodborne illness increases in warm weather. We also know that consumers can fight BAC!® by following these four simple steps to safer food in the summertime.

**Clean: Wash Hands and Surfaces Often**
Unwashed hands are a prime cause of foodborne illness.

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.
- When eating away from home, find out if there's a source of potable (safe drinking) water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning. Or pack clean, wet, disposable washcloths or moist towelettes and paper towels for cleaning hands and surfaces.

**Separate: Don't Cross-Contaminate**
Cross-contamination during preparation, grilling, and serving food is a prime cause of foodborne illness.

- When packing the cooler chest for an outing, wrap raw meats securely; avoid raw meat juices from coming in contact with ready-to-eat food.
- Wash plates, utensils, and cutting boards that held the raw meat or poultry before using again for cooked food.

**Cook: Cook to Proper Temperatures**
Food safety experts agree that food is safely cooked when it is heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

- Take your thermometer along. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, so be sure that meats are cooked thoroughly. Check them with a food thermometer.
- Cook beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops to a safe minimum internal temperature of 145 °F. Cook steaks and roasts that have been tenderized, boned, rolled, etc., to an internal temperature of 160 °F.
- Cook all cuts of pork to an internal temperature of 160 °F.
- Cook ground beef, veal and lamb an internal temperature of 160 °F.
- All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F throughout the product.
- Cook meat and poultry completely at the picnic site. Partial cooking of food ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that subsequent cooking cannot destroy them.

**Chill: Refrigerate Promptly**
Holding food at an unsafe temperature is a prime cause of foodborne illness. Keep cold food cold!

- Cold refrigerated perishable food like luncheon meats, cooked meats, chicken, and potato or pasta salads should be kept in an insulated cooler packed with several inches of ice, ice packs, or containers of frozen water.
- Consider packing canned beverages in one cooler and perishable food in another cooler because the beverage cooler will probably be opened frequently.
- Keep the cooler in the coolest part of the car, and place in the shade or shelter, out of the sun, whenever possible.
- Preserve the cold temperature of the cooler by replenishing the ice as soon as it starts melting.
- If a cooler chest is not an option, consider taking fruits, vegetables, hard cheeses, or...
dried meats, dried cereal, bread, peanut butter, crackers, and a bottle of refreshing beverage.

• Take-out food: If you don't plan to eat take-out food within 2 hours of purchase, plan ahead and chill the food in your refrigerator before packing for your outing.

**Leftovers?**
Food left out of refrigeration for more than 2 hours may not be safe to eat. Above 90 °F, food should not be left out over 1 hour. Play it safe; 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.**

Source: US Department of Agriculture

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**Promoting Safe and Healthy Environments**

**Water Safety**

Drowning rank behind only motor-vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death among youngsters in middle childhood. Most often, these tragedies occur when children swim without adequate adult supervision. In most cases, these children (and their parents) have overestimated their swimming ability and their knowledge of water-survival skills.

Here are some guidelines to keep your middle-years child safe in and near the water:

- Make sure your youngster (older than age 4) learns how to swim from an experienced and qualified instructor. Check for available lessons at local recreation centers and summer camps.
- Never allow your child to swim alone or play by or in water away from the watchful eye of an adult. Ideally, this adult should be trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Also, teach your child to use the buddy system even when swimming with large groups of friends.
- Do not allow your child to engage in horseplay that might result in injury.
- Prohibit your child from diving unless someone has already determined the depth of the water and checked for underwater hazards.
- Do not allow your child to swim in areas where there are boats or fishermen. Nor should he swim at beaches where there are large waves, a powerful undertow or no lifeguards. Make sure he understands that swimming in one body of water (e.g., a backyard pool) may be different from swimming in another (a river or ocean).
- Do not permit your child to rely on an air mattress, inner tube or inflatable toy as a life preserver. If these devices deflate, or your child slips off them, he could be in serious trouble.
- If your pool has a cover, remove it completely before swimming. Also, never allow your child to walk on the pool cover; water may have accumulated on it, making it as dangerous as the pool itself. Your child also could fall through it and become trapped underneath.

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Keep a safety ring with a rope beside the pool at all times. If possible, have a phone in the pool area with emergency numbers clearly marked.

- Spas and hot tubs are dangerous for young children who can easily drown or become overheated in them. Don’t allow young children to use these facilities.
- Your child should always wear a life preserver when he swims or rides in a boat. A life preserver fits properly if you can't lift it off over your child's head after he's been fastened into it. For the child younger than age 5, particularly the non-swimmer, it also should have a flotation collar to keep the head upright and the face out of the water.
- Your child should never be permitted to swim during a lightning storm.
- If you have a backyard swimming pool, it should be enclosed with high and locked fences on all four sides, especially the side that separates the house from the pool.
- When your youngster is old enough - usually by his high school years - he should learn life-saving skills such as CPR, taught in most cities through community agencies or the American Red Cross.

Younger children are often drawn to water as well. For these children, water can be especially hazardous. To ensure your child's safety, keep the rules above in mind and also take note of these additional tips for younger children.

- Be aware of small bodies of water your child might encounter, such as fishponds, ditches, fountains, rain barrels, watering cans and even the bucket you use when you wash the car. Children are drawn to places and things like these and need constant supervision to be sure they don't fall in.
- Children who are swimming, even in a shallow toddler's pool, should be watched by an adult, preferably one who knows CPR. Inflatable pools should be emptied and put away after each play session.

Although swimming classes for young children are widely available, the American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend them for children younger than age 4 for two reasons:

1. You may be lulled into being less cautious because you think your child can swim.
2. Young children who are repeatedly immersed in water may swallow so much of it that they develop water intoxication. This can result in convulsions, shock and even death.

If you do enroll a child younger than 4 years old in a swimming program, think of it primarily as an opportunity to enjoy playing in the water. Be sure the class you choose adheres to guidelines established by the national YMCA. Among other things, these guidelines forbid submersion of young children and encourage parents to participate in all activities. When your child reaches 4 years of age, you may want to teach him to swim so he'll feel more comfortable in and around water. But remember that even a child who knows how to swim needs to be watched constantly.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics