



Each year, the arrival of summer is synonymous with spending increased time outside. For many Clarington residents, these months mean sharing moments with family and friends, and when it comes to entertaining, nothing compares to sitting around a picnic table or grilling on the barbeque!

Unfortunately, leaving the confines of our kitchen can pose a food safety challenge and as people move to cooking outside, the risk of food-borne illness increases. Public health experts estimate that there are approximately 11 million cases of food-borne illness in Canada every year. Many of these cases can be prevented by using safe food preparation practices: before and after preparing food, wash hands, cutting boards, utensils and countertops thoroughly and often with warm and soapy water; cut and prepare raw meat, fish and poultry on a separate cutting board from that used to cut ready to eat vegetables, fruit or other foods; refrigerate perishable foods promptly; and cook food to its recommended temperature.

As with any type of food preparation, when cooking outside, it's important to follow safe food handling guidelines to prevent harmful bacteria from spreading and causing food-borne illness. When preparing for a barbeque or packing a picnic, these few simple measures will help you stay healthy this summer:

Smart Planning

Raw meat should be stored in the original packaging in the refrigerator immediately after you return home from the grocery store. If you don't plan to cook raw meat right away, it should be placed in the freezer.

While it may take longer, thawing should be done in the refrigerator. Alternatively, sealed packages can be thawed in cold running water. Remember that meat should be completely thawed before grilling so that it cooks more evenly.

If you plan to take your food to another location, refrigerate or freeze the food the day before, so

that it will already be cold when you are ready to pack your cooler. Wash fruits and vegetables before you leave home because you may not have access to clean water where you're going.

Cooler Competence

When transporting food to a picnic site, make sure to use a cooler with freezer ice packs. Loose ice or cubes can melt and then drip and possibly transfer contaminants from one food to another.

Separate raw food from cooked food and place raw meat and poultry in sealed containers packed at the bottom of the cooler. This will keep their juices from dripping onto other food.

If you are driving to your destination, place your cooler in the coolest part of your vehicle and, on hot days, consider using air conditioning.

Don't forget to wash and sanitize your cooler before and after each use!

Skilful Grilling

Marinate meat in the refrigerator, not on the counter. If you want to save some of the marinade to baste cooked meat or use as a dipping sauce, make sure to set some aside that hasn't touched uncooked meat and keep it refrigerated.

Raw meat must be cooked properly to a safe internal temperature to avoid food-borne illness. Colour alone is not a reliable indicator that meat is safe to eat; therefore, a digital food thermometer should be used. When checking the temperature of meat, take it off the grill and place it on a clean plate. Insert the thermometer through the thickest part of the meat. For hamburgers, insert the thermometer through the side of the patty, all the way to the middle. As the heat on a barbecue can be uneven, make sure to check each piece of meat individually. Remember to always clean the thermometer in warm, soapy water between temperature

readings to avoid cross-contamination.

All food should be kept hot until you are ready to eat. Place cooked meats to the side of the grill, not directly over coals where they can overcook.

Our Responsibility

The risk of food-borne illness increases during the summer when temperatures are warmer and people are more likely to be cooking outside or picnicking. The Government of Canada and its food industry partners work together to maintain a safe food supply. However, once food is purchased, the safe handling, storage and preparation of the food is the responsibility of each one of us.

For more information, please visit the Public Health Agency of Canada's website at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca, the Health Canada website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php, or the newly launched food safety portal at www.foodsafety.gc.ca.

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