



news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WOULD YOU LIKE A SIDE OF E. COLI WITH YOUR BURGER? Barbecue safety tips from the Westchester County Health Department

Memorial Day, the unofficial first day of summer, is here and what would Memorial Day be without a barbecue? While no one wants to rain on that parade, the Westchester County Department of Health is reminding residents that barbecue season is also peak season for food poisoning.

“The number of bacterial food poisoning cases from E. Coli and salmonella rise in the summer months,” said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “The warm weather causes food to spoil more quickly and it is easy to get lax with food hygiene precautions when cooking outdoors.”

Anyone who has had a bout of food poisoning knows that it can be a very unpleasant experience. Foodborne illness can sometimes be very serious, requiring hospitalization, and may even be fatal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that foodborne illnesses result in more than 300,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths each year throughout the United States.

The Westchester County Health Department is offering the following guidelines to residents for safe barbecuing and picnicking this summer:

- Remember to thaw meat and poultry slowly in the refrigerator or under cold running water before cooking. Microwave defrosting is acceptable if the meat will be cooked immediately afterwards.
- Harmful bacteria usually grow in the "danger zone" between 40° and 140° F, so keep meat and poultry in the refrigerator until you are ready to throw it on the grill. Marinate it in the refrigerator too. If you want to use additional marinade as a sauce be sure to boil it first to kill the bacteria, or set a portion of it aside so it does not come into contact with raw meat.

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- Precooking in the oven or microwave can reduce time at the grill but only precook immediately before finishing on the grill. Never partially grill meat or poultry and finish cooking later.
- When transporting food to another location, use a cooler with ice to keep it at 40°F or below. Everything should stay chilled until immediately before it will be cooked or consumed. Keep the cooler out of the direct sun and avoid opening the lid too often. It helps to keep beverages in a separate cooler.
- As always, cleanliness is essential to prevent foodborne illness. Wash hands, surfaces and utensils frequently with soap and water or antiseptic wipes.
- Never use the same plate, cutting board and utensils for cooked food that you used for raw meats and poultry. Bacteria in the juices of raw meat and poultry can contaminate safely cooked food.
- Meat and poultry cooked on a grill browns very quickly but may not be cooked inside. Always use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature. In the case of whole poultry this should be 180°F in the middle. Hamburgers and pork chops should reach 160°F throughout. Beef, veal, and lamb chops can be cooked to 145°F.
- After cooking, keep meat and poultry at 140°F or warmer until eaten. If fully cooked meats like hot dogs need to be reheated, grill them to 165°F.
- Refrigerate any hot or cold leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Discard any food that is left out for more than two hours after cooking, or one hour if temperature is above 90°F.

Residents are urged to follow these safety tips to make sure E. Coli and Salmonella do not become uninvited guests at your barbecue or picnic this summer.

For more information, please call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at www.westchestergov.com/health.