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N E W S

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Plan Your Picnic with Food Safety in Mind

LIMA – The Fourth of July is nearly upon us, and many Americans will celebrate our Nation's birthday by grilling or attending cookouts. Safe food handling is the key to making your cookout safe and healthy for everyone. If food is not handled correctly, foodborne illness can be an unwelcome souvenir.

These three tips can help you handle food correctly:

1. **Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold** – Meat and poultry products may contain bacteria that cause foodborne illness. They must be cooked to destroy these bacteria and then kept at temperatures that are either too hot or too cold for these bacteria to grow.
2. **Keep everything clean** - Bacteria present on raw meat and poultry products can be easily spread to other foods by juices dripping from packages, hands, or utensils. Wash your hands before and after handling food. Soap and water are essential to cleanliness, so if you are going somewhere that will not have running water, bring water with you. Even disposable wipes will do.
3. **Cook and store foods safely** – A food thermometer is the most important tool that will tell you if your food is thoroughly cooked, as color is not a reliable indicator of doneness. Perishable food should never sit out for more than two hours. Discard any food that has been out too long.

If you are taking food to an outdoor picnic, remember these tips:

- Don't travel with the cooler in the trunk; carry it inside the air-conditioned car.
- Keep the cooler in the shade.
- Keep the lid closed and avoid repeated openings. Use a separate cooler for beverages.
- Replenish the ice if it melts.

For more food safety and grilling tips, contact USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, www.fsis.usda.gov
Or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

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