

# Fourth of July food safety

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SPRINGFIELD – Fire up the grill, whip up the potato salad, and know how to keep food safe for the Fourth of July holiday. Whether you’re grilling out, packing a picnic, or getting a snack together to eat while you watch fireworks, there are some simple steps you can take that will reduce the chance of getting a foodborne illness.



“One food safety essential is making sure food is at the proper temperature, whether it’s cooking it to the right temperature on the grill, or keeping it cold,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Nirav D. Shah. “There is something called the ‘Danger Zone,’ when food sits at a temperature between 40°F and 140°F, which is when

bacteria grow most rapidly. Keeping food at the proper temperature, making sure there is no cross-contamination, and keeping hands and utensils clean are key to avoiding foodborne illness.”

It can be difficult to keep food cold during the summer, especially while traveling. One tip to help keep your cooler below 40°F is to pack beverages in one cooler and food in another. Chances are the cooler with the beverages will be opened much more frequently, causing the temperature inside the cooler to fluctuate, which would be bad news for food.

Food should also be separated in the cooler: raw meat and poultry should be separate from fruits, vegetables, cheeses, salads, and even cooked foods. This will help avoid cross contamination. The juices of raw meat can mingle with foods that are ready to eat and you could end up with a *Salmonella* sandwich instead of a hamburger on a bun. And make sure the cooler is in the shade and out of the direct sun. This will help keep the temperature below 40°F.

Now it's time to apply some heat. Whether you're cooking on the grill or in a kitchen, make sure food reaches the proper temperature. And don't just eyeball the color of the meat. That doesn't always indicate the level of doneness. Use a meat thermometer.

- 145°F – whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and veal
- 145°F – fish
- 160°F – hamburgers and other ground beef
- 165°F – all poultry and pre-cooked meats, like hot dogs

Make sure to use clean utensils and a clean plate when you take food off the grill. Using the same utensils and plate that you did for the raw meat could add an unintended *E.coli* marinade to your food.

Chances are, if you're outside, you've touched something dirty – playground equipment, baseball, lake water, etc. If there is not running water and soap to wash your hands where you're going, don't forget to bring the hand sanitizer. Clean your hands before preparing food and eating.

Once you've had your fill, it's time to chill. Make sure all leftovers are refrigerated or put on ice within two hours after cooking, or one hour if the temperature is above 90°F. Don't let that potato salad bake in the sun and become a source of sickness.

More [food safety tips](#) or information about [foodborne illnesses and symptoms](#) can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.