

Hospital Happenings – July 2011
Consider Food Safety during your Summer Picnics

Who doesn't enjoy a great picnic with your family and friends during the summer? From grilled burgers and hot dogs to homemade coleslaw and fruit salad, it's hard to beat a barbecue. We would like to give you some reminders and hints to help make your activity safe start to finish.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one out of six people in the United States suffer from a food-borne illness each year. As a result, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die. The young, the elderly, and the ill are most susceptible to severe reactions to food-borne illnesses.

The good news is that food-borne illnesses are largely preventable. Before serving your next "famous burger" or summer salad, consider these tips:

Sufficiently cook your meat and eggs. Raw animal products are most likely to be contaminated. Unpasteurized milk, raw eggs, raw shellfish and raw meat are the most dangerous. Make sure that your eggs have a firm yolk and cook your meat to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees helps kill parasites, bacteria and viruses.

Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables. Washing decreases, but does not eliminate the risk of contamination in fruits and vegetables. Don't forget to support our local farmers' market and growers.

Avoid cross-contamination. Wash your cutting boards, mixing bowls and knives/utensils after each use. This will minimize the possibility of passing contaminants from one food to another. Keeping your countertops clean with an anti-bacterial cleanser is important, too.

Promptly refrigerate leftovers. Food that sits at room temperature can quickly develop bacteria. To preserve freshness and increase safety, be sure to quickly refrigerate your leftovers.

When eating out, research restaurants before dining. Better understand a restaurant's food handling and sanitation practices by researching how it scored on its most recent health inspection. Use the information to determine which restaurants you support and trust. And when ordering meat, be sure to specify that you want it thoroughly cooked.

Food is an integral part of everyday life. As such, it is important that both producers and consumers take the necessary steps to minimize the risk of food-borne illnesses. Ensuring sanitary conditions and proper preparation can go a long way in supporting the health of your loved ones.

So, this summer, consider food safety as you prepare, serve and store food for your family and friends. Enjoy barbecues and picnics, and the many magnificent fruits and vegetables readily available during these months. Don't forget to take in the colors and smells that come from cooking with fresh ingredients.