



For Immediate Release:

July 1, 2009

Happy 4th of July, LA County!

Celebrate safely by preventing food-borne illnesses at your cookout, and avoiding injuries from fireworks at home

LOS ANGELES – As the Fourth of July holiday approaches, many Southern Californians might be dusting off their grills, and preparing to spend the holiday weekend enjoying picnics at the beach, or barbecuing in the backyard. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health would like to remind cooks that combining warm temperatures and the great outdoors could be a recipe for disaster if the food is not properly handled.

“Barbeques or picnics are great opportunities to spend time with family and friends, but proper food handling techniques should be used to make sure the party is not spoiled by illness. Food contains bacteria that could cause food poisoning if the dishes are not properly prepared or cooked,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Simple food safety precautions such as washing your hands before and after handling raw food and maintaining correct temperatures during and after cooking will ensure your guests walk away with great memories of a good meal instead of a nasty illness.”

Some common symptoms that may be caused by food-borne illness include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, dehydration, and fever. Most of these types of illnesses are caused by three problems: allowing “cold” foods, like potato salad, to get warm or “hot” foods, like casseroles or meatballs, to get to room temperature; handling food with contaminated hands; and not cooking foods such as meat or chicken thoroughly.

Before you barbeque or prepare food:

- Always wash your hands with hot water and soap before and after handling any food, especially raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- When marinating for long periods of time, it is important to keep foods refrigerated. Don't use sauce that was used to marinate raw meat or poultry on cooked food.
- Keep raw foods, especially meat, poultry, or seafood, away from cooked foods. Do not use the same plate, tray or utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- Keep meats, salads, and other perishable foods in the refrigerator until you are ready to use them. If you store your food in a cooler, keep the temperature at or below 40° F (4° C), and keep the lid closed as much as possible. Pack plenty of extra ice or freezer packs to insure a constant cold temperature. Store your cooler in the shade, away from birds and animals.
- Barbeques should be pre-heated before cooking. When using a charcoal grill, preheat the coals on your grill for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the coals are lightly coated with ash.

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During cooking:

Always check the temperature of the food before you stop cooking. Use a food thermometer to make sure food has reached a safe internal temperature:

- Beef, veal, lamb steaks, roasts: at least 145° F (63° C) for medium rare and to 160° F (71° C) for medium.
- Ground beef (hamburgers), ground pork: at least 160° F (71° C).
- Ground poultry (chicken or turkey burgers): 165° F (74° C).
- Poultry breasts, whole poultry: at least 170° F (77° C).
- Fish: should be opaque and flake easily with a fork.
- Shrimp, lobster, crabs: meat should be pearly and opaque.
- Clams, oysters, mussels: shells should be open.

After cooking:

- Put cooked food on a clean plate or tray.
- Don't use leftover marinade or sauce from the raw food on the cooked food.
- Keep all food covered to prevent cross contamination and to avoid attracting flies.
- Eat food as soon as it is ready.
- Leftovers should be placed in shallow containers, and refrigerated. Food may be covered when cool.
- Leftovers should be reheated to 165° F (74° C) before eating.
- Eat leftovers within two days.

For more information on food safety, visit the “Fight Bac!” website from the Partnership for Food Safety Information at <http://www.fightbac.org>.

If you plan to barbecue your dinner, remember that safe grilling doesn't just mean taking precautions with the food itself. Grilling outside can give your food a delicious, smoky flavor, but it can also cause fires if you aren't careful. Before you light up the grill, check out these safety tips from the American Red Cross:

- Use gas and charcoal barbecue grills outside only.
- Position grills far from siding, deck railings, overhanging branches and house eaves.
- Keep children and pets at least three feet away from the grill area.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals have already been ignited.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using grills.
- Always supervise a barbecue grill when in use.

Cooks can also check their home's kitchen for restaurant-quality standards with Public Health's Home Kitchen Self-Inspection website. Visit <http://lapublichealth.org/phcommon/public/eh/fsquiz> and answer the questions as accurately as possible. At the end, you'll receive a letter grade that reflects how well you would have fared if real Public Health inspectors had gone through your kitchen.

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If you receive an “A” and live in California, Public Health will mail you a refrigerator magnet made to look like the report cards posted in restaurant windows. You will also receive detailed recommendations for improving your kitchen based on responses that were considered “violations.” These recommendations are adapted from the California Health and Safety Code, which is the regulatory authority for retail food inspections in California.

“The test is so simple that anyone with a little free time and access to the Internet can take advantage of it. This is not only a fun exercise; it’s a good way to see if you’re protecting yourself from food-borne illnesses,” said Dr. Fielding. “Every year, about 76 million people nationwide experience a food-borne illness. The illnesses can be very serious, and result in about 325,000 hospitalizations annually and 5,000 deaths. Don’t become part of that statistic – take a minute to make sure you and your family are safe.”

Enjoy Fireworks Safely

While it is tempting to set off fireworks at home on the 4th of July, many cities throughout Los Angeles County have banned fireworks due to their danger. Nearly half of all firework-related injuries and deaths happen among children and teens.

“Children are naturally drawn to sparklers or other small fireworks, but parents should remember that these devices are actually small explosives that can cause major injuries,” said Dr. Fielding. “Life-changing injuries such as blindness, third degree burns, and permanent scarring are not worth the few seconds of excitement from a sparkler, bottle rocket, or other small firework.”

Most injuries occur to the hands, eyes, head, face, and ears. More than half of the injuries were burns. Fireworks can also cause life-threatening residential and motor vehicle fires. Residents are urged to avoid buying their own fireworks at potentially illegal “fireworks stands,” and should instead visit a professional fireworks show. For more information about fireworks safety and a list of shows, visit <http://www.safejuly4th.org/fw/index.htm>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

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