



## County of Sacramento

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### **NEWS RELEASE**

## **Food Safety Tips for Your July 4th Cookout**

Sacramento, CA – Nothing is more fun than a 4th of July picnic or barbecue. In addition to being careful not to overeat, it's important during your party to follow safe food handling steps so your food will be safe and healthy for you and your guests.

Environmental Health Division Chief John Rogers says foodborne illness can easily be prevented by proper handling of raw foods when preparing and cooking your meal, including the storage of leftovers. "Frequent hand washing is another important safety tip for all of us to remember. Each of us can play a role in preventing foodborne illness with good personal hygiene and safe food practices."

When preparing for a barbecue or picnic, be aware of the following important safety issues: thawing, preparing, marinating, cooking and maintaining at proper temperature, safe serving, and handling of leftovers.

### **Safe Thawing**

Never thaw your meat on the counter or defrost it in hot water. Storing foods at room temperatures is not a safe practice. This is when bacteria multiply most rapidly. There are only three safe ways to thaw food: in a refrigerator that can hold 41°F, under cold running water, or in a microwave oven.

### **Safe Preparation**

Be especially careful with raw meats. Bacteria present on raw meats can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods, bacteria from the raw meats can then be transferred to other foods. After working with raw meats, always wash your hands, utensils, and work surfaces before they touch other foods. Remember to use soap and warm water and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. If you are preparing this at an outside venue where a sink is not available, make sure you have liquid hand soap, paper towels, and some unscented, liquid chlorine bleach mixed with water (1 tablespoon per gallon of water) for sanitizing your cutting surfaces. If possible, bring two cutting surfaces with you – one for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Don't forget that grills need an annual cleaning after winter storage by scouring the grate with a wire brush. Spray the grid with oven cleaner and rinse thoroughly.

### **Safe Marinating**

Again, temperature is the key here. Always marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Sauce that is used to marinate raw meat, poultry, or seafood should not be used on cooked foods. Be sure to keep foods cold when transporting the marinated foods to your event.

### **Safe Cooking**

Remember to keep your meat cold until ready to grill. Always make sure to cook your food at a high enough temperature. If you are working with a gas grill, set the temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure your meat is completely thawed. If you are working with charcoal, cut the meat open before serving to make sure it is cooked or bring a food thermometer with you to test doneness. Ground beef patties should be cooked to 155°F and chicken to 165°F. Large cuts of beef such as roasts and steaks may be cooked to 145°F for medium rare or to 160°F for medium. Pork should be cooked to at least 145°F. Reheat leftover foods to 165°F. Be sure to clean the thermometer between uses. When taking foods off the grill, do not put cooked food items back on the same plate that previously held raw food.

### **Safe Serving and Leftover Handling**

Perishable foods should not be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Be especially aware of eggs. A cooler for perishable food is essential. It is important to keep it closed, out of the sun and, if possible, covered for further insulation. If possible, bring two coolers – one for drinks and another for highly perishable food. Pack your coolers with several inches of ice, blocks of ice, or frozen gel-packs. Use water-tight containers to store food and to prevent food from coming into contact with melted ice. For optimum results, promptly refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow containers. Wrap tightly for best quality.

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