FN661 (Reviewed Oct. 2026)

Keep Food Safe During Summer Picnics

Although mosquitoes and flies can be annoying pests at picnics, the "bugs" you can't see, such as harmful bacteria, are a bigger problem. Bacteria love the warm, humid days of summer and multiply faster than at any other time of the year. The number of people who get sick from something they ate increases during the sizzling summer months. Use the following tips to beat bacteria at your summer picnic.

Keep it Clean!

- Find out if your picnic destination has a source of safe drinking water. If not, bring water or moist towelettes for cleaning hands and surfaces.
- Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Unwashed hands are a major cause of foodborne illness. Use moist towelettes if hand-washing facilities are not available.
- Be sure raw meat and poultry are wrapped securely to prevent their juices from cross-contaminating other foods in the cooler.
- Pack enough clean utensils for both eating and serving food. Don't use the same utensil or platter for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Disposable plates and utensils help prevent cross-contamination.
- Keep foods covered to prevent insects from enjoying your lunch!



Keep Cold Foods Cold!

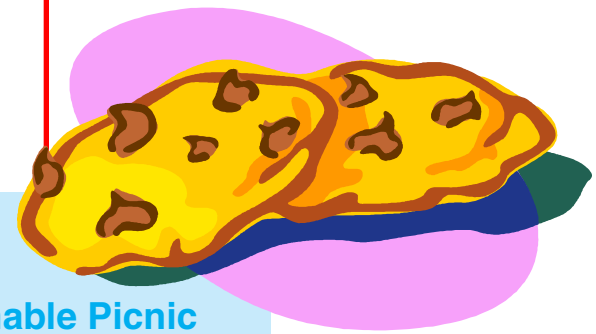
- Keep perishable foods cool by transporting them in an insulated cooler with plenty of ice or frozen gel packs. Perishable foods include meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, pasta, rice, cooked vegetables and fresh, peeled and cut fruits and vegetables.
- Pack the cooler just before leaving home. Foods chilling in your refrigerator should be placed directly in your cooler with ice or frozen gel packs.
- Avoid frequently opening coolers containing perishable food. It's a good idea to store beverages and perishable foods in separate coolers.
- Keep the cooler in an air-conditioned vehicle during travel and in the shade at the picnic site. Avoid transporting the cooler in your vehicle's trunk.

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Keep Hot Foods Hot!

- Food should not be left out of the cooler or off the grill more than two hours (one hour when the outside temperature is above 90 degrees Fahrenheit). Holding food at an unsafe temperature is another major cause of foodborne illness.
- Raw meat and poultry may contain bacteria that cause foodborne illness. These foods must be cooked and held at temperatures either too hot or too cold for bacteria to survive and grow. Bacteria multiply readily between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Remember to pack a food thermometer to check the doneness of meat. For example, beef burgers should reach an internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit and chicken breasts, 165 degrees Fahrenheit. Clean your thermometer with warm, soapy water after every use.
- When reheating food at a picnic, make sure it reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit.



Consider Nonperishable Picnic Alternatives

- Baked potato chips instead of potato salad.
- Whole fruit (apples, oranges, bananas, etc.) — rinsed with water before eating — instead of cut-up fruit salad.
- Cookies or brownies instead of perishable cream or fruit-filled pies.

Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D.
Food and Nutrition Specialist

Tami Totland, R.D., L.R.D.
Former Program Assistant

For more information on summer food safety, visit the NDSU Extension website:
www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

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