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**Contact: Taylor Eades, PIO Officer
(815)432-2483
teades@co.iroquois.il.us**

Summer Food Safety Tips

Food is an important part of many summer backyard activities. Don't let food-related illness ruin your fun.

Food safety boils down to five basic rules:

1. Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.
2. Keep everything in the kitchen clean.
3. Wash hands frequently.
4. Keep grills and utensils clean.
5. Properly handled leftovers.

Refrigerate cooked foods that are not served immediately. If food is left unrefrigerated longer than two hours, the chance of bacterial growth increases. Check your refrigerator to make sure it is at 41° F or less.

PREVENT BACTERIA FROM GETTING INTO FOOD

Hands should always be thoroughly washed with soap and warm water before handling food and after touching raw food. Towels and wash cloths should be kept clean. Grill preparation areas and utensils should be washed with hot, soapy water between each step in food preparation. Avoid cross contamination by washing or using separate plates when transferring uncooked food onto the grill and from the grill to be served.

PROPER THAWING AND COOKING

Many warm-blooded animals, turkeys and other poultry, often harbor Salmonella and other organisms that can cause food-related illness. Purchased and packaged meats, too, can be contaminated with these organisms. Proper thawing and cooking are important to avoid these illnesses.

To avoid contamination, store all raw meat products on the bottom shelf or separate from other food products in your refrigerator, especially during the thawing process. This will help keep raw meat juices from contaminating other foods. Thaw food in a refrigerator where the temperature is no higher than 41° F. Cook fish, meat, and poultry, completely without interrupting the cooking process; an interruption could allow bacteria to grow. Be sure that fish, hot dogs, and steaks are cooked to 145° F, pork, brats, and hamburger reaches the temperature of at least 155° F, and poultry reaches the temperature of 165° F or above. To check the temperature use a meat thermometer. Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat, avoiding fat and bone. For poultry, insert it into the thick part of the thigh next to the body. Wash and rinse the thermometer between uses to prevent possible contamination.

LEFTOVERS

The safe storage of leftovers is just as important as proper cooking. After the meal, immediately refrigerate leftovers in small shallow containers. Do not allow foods to sit several hours as this will provide time for the growth of disease-causing bacteria. Do not cool leftovers on the kitchen counter. Divide them into smaller portions so they will cool quicker, putting them in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Serve leftovers either very cold (directly from the refrigerator) or very hot (heated to 165° F or higher).

Young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and those who are ill or whose immune systems are compromised, should not eat raw or undercooked animal products unless they have consulted their physician.

For more information or questions please contact Julia Niziolek, Assistant Sanitarian at 815-432-2483.