GREAT GRILLING

Preventing Food-borne Illness

(NAPSA)—Grilling season is upon us. Thousands of Americans will enjoy the juicy, tasty creations of backyard cooks this summer. Many of these weekend chefs will worry about overcooking or charring their food. But what is more important is for these cooks to know about the dangers of food-borne illness and learning how they can prevent it.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, food-borne illness is a serious public health issue. According to figures from the CDC, 5,000 people die every year due to some type of food-borne illness—that is almost 14 people every day.

"Bacteria grow more quickly in warmer temperatures and that is why we see an increase in food-borne illnesses every summer," said Dr. Richard Raymond, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's highest-ranking food safety official.

Everyone should learn the four simple lessons of food safety—clean, separate, cook and chill. These are the messages of USDA's Be Food Safe campaign and they will help people prevent food-borne illnesses.

Clean—Hand washing is one of the simplest ways to help reduce the threat of food-borne illness. Research has shown that you need

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to wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds to ensure they are clean enough to handle foods. Also be sure to clean surfaces and utensils.

Separate—A common mistake people make is serving cooked food on the same plate that was used to transport the raw meat or poultry from the kitchen to the grill. Cross-contamination can also occur when vegetables or other uncooked foods come into contact with cutting boards, plates and utensils that were used for raw meat and poultry products. Try using different-colored cutting boards for vegetables and for raw meat.

Cook—Meat and poultry must be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature in order to destroy the bacteria that may be present in the foods. Doing so requires the use of a food thermometer; you simply cannot tell if food is safely cooked by looking at it. For hamburgers, the thermometer should show a safe minimum internal temperature of 160°F. For poultry, the safe minimum internal temperature is 165°F.

Chill—Play it safe by putting leftovers and perishable foods back on ice or in the refrigerator after eating—within one hour during the warm summer months. Don't send leftovers home with the guests unless this food is transported in a cooler with ice and immediately chilled. These foods can reach the "Danger Zone" (40°F to 140°F), where bacteria can grow and multiply if not properly chilled. Also, cold foods need to be kept cold (40°F or lower). Use coolers and ice to maintain these temperatures.

You can get your food safety questions answered 24/7 by logging on to www.askkaren.gov. If you have a food safety question, you can call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) MPHotline.