

SAFETY SENSE

Camping And Food Safety: Tell Bacteria To Take A Hike

(NAPSA)—It's never a good idea to invite bacteria along on a hike or campout, and yet meals eaten during these warm weather activities often increase the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Illnesses from food increase during warm months for two reasons. One, bacteria grow and multiply faster in the warmer months, especially at temperatures between 90°F to 110°F.

The second reason is people. During warmer months, there's an upswing in foodborne illnesses because outside activities increase and more people are cooking outside at picnics, barbecues and on camping trips. The safety controls that a kitchen provides such as refrigeration and washing facilities are usually not available.

Most bacteria do not grow rapidly in the refrigerator (40°F or below) or above 140°F. The temperature range in between 40°F to 140°F is known as the "Danger Zone." Bacteria multiply rapidly at these temperatures and can reach dangerous levels after 2 hours—1 hour if the temperature is above 90°F.

So when you are enjoying food in the great outdoors, always keep cold foods cold. If you are traveling with cold foods, bring a cooler with a cold source. If cooking over a campfire or portable stove, bring a food thermometer to make sure the food reaches safe temperatures. Food is safely cooked when it is heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

If you can't take a cooler, pack only foods that are safe without refrigeration, such as fruits, vegetables, hard cheeses, canned or



When you take food on a hike or campout, make sure you don't give bacteria a free ride. Bacteria grow faster in the warmer months.

dried meats, or peanut butter and crackers.

General Rules for Outdoor Food Safety

- Never bring meat, poultry or other perishable foods without a cold source to keep them safe.
- Use an insulated cooler if car-camping, or pack foods frozen with a cold source if hiking or backpacking.
- Keep raw foods separate from other foods to prevent cross-contamination.
- Bring disposable wipes or biodegradable soap for hand- and dishwashing.
- Carry bottled water for drinking. Otherwise, boil water or use water purification tablets.
- Even if you have a cooler, leftover food is safe only if the cooler still has plenty of ice or frozen gel packs in it. Otherwise, discard any perishable leftovers.

For more food safety information, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-(888) MP Hotline, or 1-(888) 674-6854. You can also type a question into "Ask Karen" at www.AskKaren.gov or visit www.fsis.usda.gov.