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Keeping Summer Food Safe

This summer, there could potentially be more outdoor meals than ever before as we try to stay free of the COVID-19 virus. Having food in hot temperatures for too long can create yet another danger to our health. Consider these outdoor dining and refrigerator safety tips:

Refrigerate perishable foods promptly! Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared foods, and leftovers within two hours of purchase or use. When temperatures are 90 degrees or above, the safe time is shortened to one hour.

Should hot foods be allowed to cool before refrigeration? Hot foods can go into the refrigerator immediately. Just remember to divide hot foods into shallow containers to speed cooling. This will temporarily change the refrigerator's internal temperature but it will not harm the refrigerator or the other food inside the refrigerator.

Get a refrigerator thermometer! They are not expensive and are available in most local grocery stores. The safe temperature is at or below 40 degrees F. Do not go too low as temperatures around 32 degrees F can form ice crystals and lower the quality of the food.

Don't jam-pack the fridge. If the refrigerator is packed with food in every nook and cranny, the air will not circulate properly and cool quickly. Make sure there is enough room for air to circulate. Use the storage bins for fruits and vegetables or meats and cheeses. Newer refrigerators are specifically designed to maximize the shelf life and safety of these foods. Eggs, however, are safer stored in their original containers.

Keep it clean. Spilled food on shelves is a perfect spot for dangerous bacteria to hide. Clean up spills right away. Regularly wash the refrigerator out with warm water and dishwashing soap, then rinse and dry with a clean towel or paper towels. Wash the shelves and bins with warm water and dishwashing soap. Rinse in warm water, then sanitize with a chlorine bleach solution (1 tablespoon unscented liquid bleach per gallon of water, 1 teaspoon liquid unscented bleach per quart of water). Let air dry or dry with single use paper towels.

Pitch, pitch, pitch. Do not keep food too long. Check perishable foods weekly. Use the food storage chart at www.food.unl.edu/free-resource/food-storage for storage guidelines specific to different foods. Four days is the average length of time to keep cooked leftovers. Raw poultry and ground meats, 1 to 2 days. This short time limit will keep food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat.

Source: www.fightbac.org