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Summertime Grilling

Summer is the season to light up the grill! Grilling is a fun and convenient way to prepare food for family and friends. However, don't let the hustle and bustle of summer gatherings interfere with safe grilling methods.

Safe grilling begins long before the cooking process. Frozen meat should be completely defrosted in the refrigerator. This allows meat to cook more evenly and prevents bacteria from growing while the meat is thawing.

Frozen meat can be thawed in the microwave as well. However, it should be grilled immediately because partially cooked portions create the perfect environment for bacteria to grow.

If meat must be transported long distances to the cookout site, pack the meat in a cooler to maintain a temperature below 40 degrees F. Coolers should be placed in the coolest part of the car and moved to a shaded area of the cookout site as soon as possible.

It is important to pack meat in a separate cooler from beverages and side dishes. This will prevent cross contamination from raw meat juices and minimize the number of times the meat cooler is opened which increases the internal temperature surrounding the meat.

Make sure the grill is preheated before starting the cooking process. During grilling, remove only the needed amount of meat from refrigeration and carry to the grill using a clean plate and grilling utensil.

Don't rely on the color of meat to decide if the meat is ready to serve. Instead, use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the meat to determine if the meat is finished cooking.

Hamburger patties should reach 160 degrees F., hot dogs 165 degrees F. and chicken breasts 165 degrees F. Medium-rare steaks should reach 145 degrees F., medium steaks, 160 degrees F. and well-done steaks 170 degrees F.

After cooking, meat should be kept at 140 degrees F. or warmer. If the meat is not eaten right away, it should be set on the side of the grill rack so the meat remains hot without overcooking.

Remove the meat from the grill with clean cooking utensils. Once the meat has been removed, it should not be left unrefrigerated for more than two hours. This time limit is reduced to one hour if outside temperatures are above 90 degrees F.

If meat is given the opportunity to enter the temperature danger zone between 40 degrees and 140 degrees, bacteria can multiply and create problems. Although meat may look safe, the meat can still be contaminated and unsafe for consumption.

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