



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104
Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Simple steps can help prevent foodborne illnesses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Ron Dawsey
(334) 206-5375

Labor Day picnics, barbecues and pre-game tailgating can provide a perfect environment for foodborne illnesses. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, estimates that 48 million illnesses and 3,000 deaths result from foodborne illness each year in this country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that each year roughly 1 out of 6 Americans gets sick and 128,000 are hospitalized from foodborne illness.

Food and beverages must be handled properly to prevent foodborne illnesses, the Alabama Department of Public Health reminds the public. While anyone can acquire a foodborne illness, those at greatest risk are infants and young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems caused by cancer treatment, diabetes, AIDS, and bone marrow and organ transplants.

Bacteria may be present on food products when they are purchased. For example, plastic-wrapped boneless chicken breasts and ground beef were once part of live animals. Raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs are not sterile. Neither is fresh produce such as lettuce, tomatoes, sprouts or melons.

Cleanliness is a major factor in preventing foodborne illness, so make sure food is handled safely after it is purchased. Everything that touches food should be clean. Safe food handling includes the following recommendations:

Clean: Wash hands and food-contact surfaces often. Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, knives, sponges and counter tops.

Separate: Do not cross-contaminate — don't let bacteria spread from one food product to another. This is especially true for raw meat, poultry and seafood. Keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods.

Cook: Cook to proper temperatures. Foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Refrigerators should be set at 40 degrees F and freezers at 0 degrees F. Check the accuracy of the settings occasionally with a thermometer.

Minimizing the time foods are held in the hazardous temperature zone will lessen the chance of acquiring a foodborne illness. The time-proven rule applies: keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.

Much of what is known about foodborne outbreaks results from investigation of outbreaks. Contact the environmental health section of your local health department if you have become ill and the suspect food was served at a large gathering such as a benefit barbecue, from a restaurant or other food service facility, or if it is a commercial product.

By remembering to handle potentially hazardous foods properly, you can help ensure your family and guests have a healthful, safe and enjoyable fall.