

BARBECUE AND FOOD SAFETY

Cooking outdoors is a time honored summer activity shared with family and friends. There's nothing quite like grilling delicious food for you and yours under sunny California skies. It's important to follow food safety guidelines to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying and causing foodborne illness. Don't get burned by bacteria! Use these simple guidelines for grilling food safely.

Safe from the Start

Make sure that you only buy your meats from legal vendors like supermarkets and butcher shops. When shopping, buy your meats and other cold foods last just before you check out. Make sure you protect the other foods in the cart from cross contamination by keeping them separated or by placing the packages of raw meat in plastic bags.

You will want to drive straight home from the store with your load of groceries so that you can get them into the refrigerator as soon as possible. Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours, or within 1 hour when the temperature is above 90°F. If you don't plan to use it right away, freeze poultry and ground meat in 1 or 2 days; freeze other meat within 4 to 5 days.



Prepare for Success

If you are starting out with frozen meat, completely thaw it before grilling so that it cooks more evenly. Defrost meats in the refrigerator overnight for slow and safe thawing. You can defrost food in the microwave if it will be placed immediately on the grill.

If you plan to marinate the meat, do so in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Poultry can be marinated up to 2 days and beef, veal, pork, and lamb may be marinated for up to 5 days. If you plan on using some of the marinade while cooking, set aside some of the marinade before it comes into contact with raw meat. Whether you have raw meat in the refrigerator for thawing or marinating, make sure that you store it on the bottom shelf with no other foods below it to prevent cross-contamination.



Just Chill

Keep meat and poultry refrigerated until ready to use and only take it out when it is going to be placed on the grill. Check the thermometer in your refrigerator to make sure that it is always 41°F or below to keep bacteria from growing. If you are using a cooler, make sure that you keep plenty of ice packed around the meat. Keep the meat in plastic bags or containers to make sure that the ice doesn't contaminate it. Try to keep the cooler in the shade and out of direct sunlight, and don't open the lid too often as that will let the cold air out and the warm air in. Never use the ice that you used to keep your meats cold for beverages either.

When transporting food to another location, make sure to keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth. Use that insulated cooler with ice to keep food at 41°F or below. Don't pack the cooler ahead of time. Take food from the refrigerator right before you leave home.

Keep it Clean

Be sure that there are plenty of clean utensils and platters available while cooking. To prevent cross contamination, and a foodborne illness, don't use the same platter or utensils that you used for the raw meat and poultry when handling the cooked meat and poultry. Juices from the raw meats contain harmful bacteria that will contaminate cooked food and cause a foodborne illness. Make sure to always wash your hands, utensils, and food contact surfaces (i.e. platters, cutting boards, and counters) after they come into contact with raw meats and their juices.

Bring the Heat

Cooking raw meat and poultry to safe minimum internal temperatures will destroy harmful bacteria. Proper cooking is essential to serving safe barbecue. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns quickly on the outside giving the appearance of being done. Use a food thermometer to check the food and ensure that it has reached a safe internal temperature. Refer to the chart below to find the safe minimum temperature for whatever you're cooking. Make sure that all foods achieve the minimum cooking temperature for a minimum of 15 seconds before removing them from the grill.



FOOD	MINIMUM COOKING TEMPERATURE
Poultry, stuffed meat, and stuffed fish	165°F
Hamburgers and other ground meats	155°F
Fish, pork, veal, lamb, and steak	145°F



Serve it Up

After cooking meat and poultry on the grill, keep it hot, at or above 135°F, until it is ready to be served. Keep the cooked meats hot by setting them to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals or flame, so that they don't overcook. Use a clean platter when taking the food off of the grill to prevent cross contamination. Serve the food as soon as possible once you've taken it off of the grill. To minimize the chance of a foodborne illness, refrigerate any leftovers promptly in shallow containers. If no refrigeration is available, then discard any food left out more than 2 hours (1 hour if temperatures are above 90 °F).

Enjoy a great BBQ season from your friends at Orange County Environmental Health!