

## Food Safety Concerns Rise During Summer Months

Brewster, NY – Warm summer weather, picnics and barbeques can present challenges to ensuring food safety. Food may be improperly cooked or stored, or simply left out in the sun too long, giving bacteria a chance to grow. Foodborne illness is a serious matter resulting in approximately 3,000 deaths nationwide each year.

“Meat always must be cooked to the proper temperature to ensure its safety,” says Health Commissioner Allen Beals, MD. “Illness-causing E-coli and salmonella can be present in undercooked meats such as hamburger and chicken and these bacteria can cause severe illness and even death.” The juice of the meat usually changes color when fully cooked, but relying on this alone is not sufficient. Check the food’s internal temperature with a stem thermometer in the center. Cook meat to at least 130°F (for a rare steak), chicken to 165°F, hamburger to 158 °F and fish to 140°F.

Other rules to follow consistently to protect against foodborne illness include:

- Eggs, milk, meats, chicken, seafood, cooked leftovers, gravies, soups, or products with these ingredients, should be kept at 40° F, or lower. Discard if their temperature exceeds 40°F.
- Fruits, vegetables, juices, and cheeses may be stored above 40° F for a limited time. Check appearance, odor, texture and color before serving or eating.
- Select frozen and refrigerated products last when shopping. Refrigerate or freeze these items immediately on arriving home. Never thaw frozen foods at room temperature, use your refrigerator.
- Use a stem thermometer to ensure foods are at the correct temperature when storing, serving, or checking for doneness.
- Cool leftovers quickly and refrigerate. Reheat leftovers only once to 165°F or over.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Cold foods should be stored at 40°F or lower. When serving hot foods, keep them hot at 140° F or higher.
- To keep foods hot, use a heat source underneath the food, and to keep foods chilled, have the cooling source/ice packs on top of foods.
- If uncertain whether a food item is fresh, follow this rule: **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.**

Kitchen and personal cleanliness is important year-round:

- Wash hands and under fingernails thoroughly with hot water and soap before preparing food and after handling raw fish, meats and poultry.
- Wash and sanitize sponges and dishrags in the dishwasher, or sanitize them by heating in the microwave on high for at least one minute.
- Wash and sanitize any surface that comes in contact with food. To make a sanitizing solution, place a capful of bleach in a gallon of water and use for wiping down food surfaces. Rinse with clean water after sanitizing. Ideally, refrigerators should be cleaned at least once a week.

For more information, call the Putnam County Department of Health's Food Safety Program at (845) 808-1390.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at [www.putnamcountyny.com/health](http://www.putnamcountyny.com/health); or visit our social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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