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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 20, 2016

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**Summer Activities Increase Risk for Foodborne Illness;
PCDOH Advises “When in Doubt, Throw it Out”**

Brewster, NY – Each year, 1 in 6 people get food poisoning nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, meaning approximately 48 million Americans get sick by consuming contaminated foods or beverages, and 3,000 of them die. With warm weather here, more cooking will be done on the grill and more coolers packed for picnics, presenting additional challenges to ensure food safety. Food may be improperly prepped, cooked, stored, or simply left out in the sun too long, creating opportunities for bacteria to grow. In 2012 Putnam County experienced its largest food-related illness outbreak, effecting approximately 150 individuals, due to food being kept at an improper temperature for an extended period of time.

“Residents can protect themselves with thorough cooking and proper refrigeration of perishable foods,” says Interim Health Commissioner Michael Nesheiwat, MD. “Illness-causing microorganisms can be present in a number of foods, so keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.”

Rules to follow consistently to protect against foodborne illness include:

- Cook meat to at least 130°F (for a rare steak), chicken to 165°F, hamburger to 158 °F and fish to 140°F. Do not rely on the color of the meat juices for determining doneness. Instead, check the food’s internal temperature with a stem thermometer in the center.
- Refrigerators should be set at 40°F or slightly lower to store foods including eggs, milk, meats, chicken, seafood, cooked leftovers, gravies, soups, or products with these ingredients. Discard food if temperature exceeds 40°F for longer than two hours.
- 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.
- Use a stem thermometer to ensure foods are at the correct temperature when storing, serving, or checking for

doneness.

- If food is to be held longer than two hours before eating, keep hot foods at 140°F or higher, and cold foods at 40°F or lower.
- 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.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately after cooling. Use a wide shallow container for faster cooling. Reheat leftovers only once to 165°F or above.
- Select frozen and refrigerated products last when shopping. Refrigerate or freeze these items immediately on arriving home.
- Cook from frozen, or defrost in the refrigerator. Never thaw frozen foods at room temperature.
- If uncertain whether a food item should be eaten, 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; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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