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## HEALTH COMMISSIONER CORNER

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### Keep ‘Event Foods’ Safe This Summer



*Allen Beals, MD Editor’s Note: Putnam County Health Commissioner Allen Beals has agreed to write a health column for the Courier on key health and safety issues. This is his inaugural column.*

Foodborne illnesses make thousands of people sick every year. Last spring we were reminded of just how easily food poisoning can occur when a Mother’s Day celebration at the Chuang Yen Monastery set the stage with a “perfect storm” of sorts...warm weather, food cooked off site and transported...resulting in nearly 150 people ill from food-related sickness.

Around Putnam County there are numerous special events and fundraisers, picnics and barbeques, held by our wonderful civic, religious and community organizations. Unlike brickandmortar restaurants that are usually staffed by personnel with food handling experience and knowledge, public gatherings held with “event foods” usually rely upon preparers, servers and hosts without a background or training in food safety.

To complicate matters further, many events are held in the summer, some outdoors when the hot weather adds additional challenges to keeping foods at proper temperatures. Events such as these—with temporary food service—are always a cause for concern among food-safety experts.

The Health Department’s Environmental Health Services staff are ready, willing and able to help residents ensure a safe event when planning public celebrations and serving food. Our food inspectors are both knowledgeable and experienced, checking more than 400 food service

operations in the county each year. For temporary food events, these staff members also review and inspect food handling operations, educate workers, and issue the required temporary food permits in a single, streamlined procedure. Our main goal is to protect the health and safety of the public as seamlessly as possible, without hampering the event itself.

By following a few simple rules, everyone can be protected. Without the proper safeguards however, serious illness can result. Erring on the side of safety is always the best choice, and our staff will work with your organization to make sure the risks are minimal.

Over the past few years, the Health Department has partnered successfully with numerous organizations and volunteer groups around the county, from fire departments and Rotaries, to Cornell Cooperative Extension for their large scale Putnam County 4-H Fair. Together we can continue to safeguard all our residents and guests, and in doing so spotlight Putnam's warm hospitality.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or my staff in the Environmental Health Division at the Health Department at 845-808-1390.

—*Allen Beals, MD*

*Commissioner of Health Putnam County Department of Health*