



# North Central District Health Department

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## **NCDHD Encourages Residents to Barbecue Safely**

Memorial Day weekend is the start of summer. It's the perfect time of year to dust off the grill and to start cooking and eating outdoors. The warm weather makes eating outside appealing, but it can provide the ideal environment for bacteria to grow. The North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) wants everyone to know that following safe food handling practices at picnics and barbecues are the best protection against food borne illness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, case reports of food borne illnesses for some of the most common bacteria, such as E.coli 0157:H7, increase during the summer months.

The data also shows that people aged 50 and older suffer more severe complications from food borne illnesses than those who are younger.

“It's very important that residents are careful about food safety, especially during the summer months,” said Patrice Sulik, NCDHD Director of Health. “Food must be handled and stored properly to avoid food borne illnesses.”

NCDHD sanitarians offer the following tips for preparing a safe outdoor meal.

- **Wash hands:** Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and dry hands with a paper towel before preparing foods, after handling raw meat or before eating. Clean hands will help prevent the spread of potentially illness-causing microorganisms.
- **Defrost safely.** Defrost completely before cooking and never at room temperature. The best way to defrost is in the refrigerator.
- **Marinate in the refrigerator.** Always use the refrigerator to marinate, never at room temperature. If you wish to use marinate for basting or dipping, reserve a separate portion in the refrigerator until use. Never re-use marinate.
- **Precook completely.** Some people like to pre-cook food to reduce grilling time. Be sure the food is fully cooked to destroy harmful bacteria. Partially cooking food is safe only if the cooking process is not interrupted and the food goes on the grill immediately. Never partially cook on the grill to finish cooking later.
- **Keep it cold.** If carrying food to a picnic site, use an insulated cooler with enough ice or ice packs to keep the food 45 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Pack food straight from the refrigerator to the cooler. Put perishable foods in one cooler and beverages in another. Keep cooler out of the sun, if possible.
- **Keep it clean.** Have plenty of clean utensils and platters, or use new, single service plastic or paper. Don't use the same platter or utensils for raw food and cooked items. Be sure to pack clean soapy sponges, cloths or towelettes. Wash hands often with soap and warm water.
- **Cook it thoroughly.** Use an accurate meat thermometer and cook food to proper temperatures. Internal temperature for beef steaks should be 145 degrees Fahrenheit, chicken should be 165 degrees Fahrenheit, and hamburgers should be 158 degrees Fahrenheit. Meat

and poultry cooked on the grill can appear cooked on the outside while actually being undercooked inside.

- **Serve and store promptly.** Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold until just ready to eat. Store foods in the refrigerator, freezer or iced cooler within one to two hours of serving. Anything left out longer should be discarded.

NCDHD board member, Len Norton of East Windsor, states, “You can reduce the risk of food borne illness to you and your family by following the tips offered by the NCDHD sanitarians. Outside barbecues are a great summer treat and should be enjoyed without the worry of contracting a food borne illness.”

Following are some tips on how to barbecue safely this summer.

1. Get in the habit of cleaning the grill after each use. Scrub the grill racks to remove marinade and/or particles of food.
2. Make sure plenty of gas is in the tank before lighting the grill. Be sure to clean the gas jets every year.
3. Have a hose, bucket of sand, or fire extinguisher on hand, if you are using a charcoal grill.
4. Keep an eye on kids while the grill is hot, even after the food has been removed.

For more information about food safety, contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854.

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## **About NCDHD**

The North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) serves the communities of Enfield, East Windsor, Ellington, Stafford, Suffield, Vernon, Windham, and Windsor Locks. NCDHD is a full-time public health department with a full-time staff funded by its member towns and an annual per capita grant from the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. NCDHD provides professional public health services in the areas of health education and disease prevention, environmental health and emergency preparedness. The mission of NCDHD is to prevent disease, injury, and disability by promoting and protecting the health and well-being of the public and our environment.

For more information about NCDHD visit [www.ncdhd.org](http://www.ncdhd.org).