



Bulletin No. 21  
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Summer Food Safety Tips

Epidemiologic investigation of these cases revealed no common exposures or food sources. Anchorage area pediatricians had not recently treated any other cases of illness due to *E. coli* O157:H7. Although the source of infection for the two cases could not be determined, both patients had consumed hamburger meat shortly before becoming ill. Infections caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 occur sporadically in Alaska and this organism should be considered when evaluating any patient with hemolytic uremic syndrome or acute onset of bloody diarrhea. Hamburger meat has been linked to several large outbreaks of gastroenteritis caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 including the outbreak traced to a fast-food restaurant chain in Washington state in January 1993.

Foodborne illness caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella* can be avoided by following a few simple precautions. These measures are especially important during the summer months when many Alaskans enjoy picnics, barbecues, and camping trips.

Cook meat and poultry properly

Ground beef and poultry must be cooked completely (no pink color left in the middle) to insure that it is safe. Ground beef should be cooked at least medium-well (155° F) rather than rare to medium (140° F) to make it safe for consumption. **Meat should be thawed completely before cooking.** Because it is easier to cook small pieces of meat thoroughly, make thin hamburgers and cut chicken into small sized pieces. Parboil or microwave chicken before placing it on the barbecue to be sure of complete cooking. **Never place cooked food on unwashed surfaces or back onto plates or cutting boards used for raw meat.** Animal products such as eggs, milk, and shellfish should not be consumed raw.

Keep hot food hot and cold foods cold

During the summer, it is important to maintain food temperatures properly. **Meat or poultry that has been cooked should either be eaten within 30 minutes or refrigerated.** Foods that have been refrigerated should be served promptly or kept chilled. If in doubt, throw it out!!

Wash hands before food handling and eating

Using soap and warm water, wash hands for at least 30 seconds after using the toilet or changing diapers and before handling food or eating. After preparing raw meat or poultry, wash again before you start handling other food.

Remember that few foods are sterile. **In almost all foods, low levels of bacteria are common and unavoidable.** These bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels if chilled foods are allowed to sit at room temperature. If large numbers of disease-causing bacteria are not killed by completely cooking the food, the result will be a predictable and unfortunate gastrointestinal illness. Observe these simple food safety tips and have a healthy summer.

(Adapted from material supplied by the Washington State Department of Health and the United States Food and Drug Administration. Reported by William H. Bell, MD, Homer and the Seattle King County Department of Public Health. Contributed by Cory Willis, RS, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and Bruce Chandler, MD, MPH and Michael Beller, MD, MPH, Section of Epidemiology.)