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## **Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun Health Lifestyles**

### **Foodborne illness is no picnic**

Ithaca/Stanton/St. Johns~ Now that backyard barbeques and family picnics are in full swing, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) would like to take the opportunity to reinforce the importance of proper food handling and remind residents that food safety should always be on the front burner.

During the summer months more people cook outside at picnics, barbeques and while camping, without easy access to refrigeration and washing facilities to keep food safe. "As the temperature rises, so does the risk of foodborne illness," said Kimberly Singh, Health Officer for MMDHD. "Hot, humid weather creates the perfect conditions for the rapid growth of bacteria."

The most common types of foodborne illnesses are those caused by the bacteria *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *E coli*, and by a group of viruses called calicivirus, also known as Norovirus.

"Many food-related illnesses go unreported due to the mistaken belief that it is just the '24 hour flu,' said Singh. "Common foodborne illness symptoms consist of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea and on average last 24 to 48 hours."

To minimize the risks of foodborne illness, follow these four easy steps when handling and preparing food:

#### **Step One – Clean**

##### **Wash hands and surfaces often to avoid the spread of bacteria.**

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food, and after handling raw meats or poultry, using the bathroom, touching pets or changing diapers. Hand sanitizer is a good alternative if no soap and water are available.
- Always wash raw fruits and vegetables in clean water. You cannot tell whether foods carry surface bacteria by the way they look, smell or taste.

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### **Step Two – SEPARATE**

**Keep raw meats and poultry separate from cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination.**

- When you pack a cooler for an outing, wrap uncooked meats and poultry securely, and put them on the bottom to prevent raw juices from dripping onto other foods.
- Keep all plates, utensils and cutting boards that touched or held raw meat or poultry separate from those to be used for cooked foods. Do not reuse plates, utensils and cutting boards for cooked foods after they have been used for raw foods. Pack extra paper goods and properly wash all used items at home.

### **Step Three – COOK**

**Make sure you kill harmful bacteria by properly cooking food.**

- Traditional visual cues like color are not a guarantee that food is safe. Don't guess! Take a digital instant-read food thermometer along to check when meat and poultry are safe to eat. Cooked foods are safe to eat when internal temperatures are:
  - 155° F for 15 seconds for ground beef
  - 145° F for 15 seconds for beef steak
  - 165° F for 15 seconds for poultry
  - 145° F for 15 seconds for pork chops/steak

### **Step Four – CHILL (Keep cold food cold)**

- Perishable foods that are normally in the refrigerator, such as luncheon meats, cooked meat, chicken, and potato or pasta salads, must be kept in an insulated cooler with freezer packs or bags of ice to keep the temperature at or near 40° F.
- Put leftovers back in the cooler as soon as you are finished eating.
- The simple rule is: When in doubt, throw it out.

For more information on proper food handling visit the United States Department of Agriculture website at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) or call MMDHD at 989-831-3607 in Montcalm County, 989-875-1002 in Gratiot County and 989-227-3110 in Clinton County.

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.*

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