

Clay County Health Department

BETTER CARE, BETTER HEALTH, BETTER LIVING

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2024

Focus on Food Safety: Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill

This September marks the 30th Annual National Food Safety Education Month, which was established by the National Restaurant Association in 1994 to heighten awareness about the importance of food safety education.

Despite being largely preventable, foodborne illnesses continue to impact millions of Americans each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths related to foodborne illness occur in the U.S. annually. Whether it's at a grocery store, restaurant, home kitchen, or anywhere in between, you can help prevent foodborne illness by remembering the four simple steps of food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

1. **Clean hands and surfaces often.** Even though we can't see them, there are millions of germs that hide on our hands and can contaminate the foods or utensils we touch.
2. **Separate raw meats, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other ready-to-eat foods.** Raw animal products contain a variety of microbes that are killed in the cooking process. Using separate cutting boards, utensils, and dishes during food preparation helps protect ready-to-eat foods from cross-contamination.
3. **Cook all foods to the right temperature.** Sight alone is not a reliable method to determine whether your food is fully cooked – be sure to use a metal-stem thermometer to properly monitor cooking temperatures.
4. **Chill (refrigerate) leftovers safely and rapidly.** Bacteria grow most rapidly when they are in the Temperature Danger Zone (41° F to 135° F). Be sure to refrigerate leftover foods within 2 hours of when the food is removed from heat or taken out of the fridge to prevent rapid bacterial growth.

Symptoms of foodborne illness can include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and flu-like symptoms such as fever, headaches, and body aches. Remember that those at risk of more severe and even life-threatening symptoms from foodborne illness include older adults, infants, young children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. If you become ill, especially with severe symptoms, seek care from a medical provider immediately.

For more information on proper food safety practices, please contact the Clay County Health Department at (618) 662-4406 or visit our website at www.healthdept.org/environmental-health/food-safety/.

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