



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

Mary Proctor

517-437-7395

May is “Food Safety Month”

Coldwater, Michigan, May 1, 2008 – With summertime quickly approaching and backyard barbeques and family picnics on the horizon, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to take the opportunity to reinforce proper food handling and inform Michigan residents that food safety is not an option, but an obligation. Consumers need to know simple steps they can take to prevent foodborne illness.

“As the temperature rises, so does the risk of foodborne illness. Hot, humid weather creates the perfect conditions for the rapid growth of bacteria,” said Mary Proctor Community Outreach Worker. “Summer also means more people are cooking outside at picnics, barbeques and camping trips, without easy access to refrigeration and washing facilities to keep food safe.”

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 your 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.
- 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.

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.
- Wash all plates, utensils, and cutting boards that touched or held raw meat or poultry before using them again for cooked foods.

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:
 - 71° C (160° F) for ground meat
 - 74° C (165° F) for leftover food and boned and deboned poultry parts
 - 74° C (165° F) for whole poultry

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 blocks of ice to keep the temperature at or near 4° C (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.

The Community Health Agency serves the residents of Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties. For information about infectious disease prevention, environmental health and other services: call 517-279-9561 or visit www.bhsj.org.

Additional information about the “ **Public Health – For Michigan. For You.**” slogan can be found at www.malph.org.

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