

## Food Safety

Summer time means spending more time outside. More people are enjoying camping, picnics and barbecues! It also means more patients flooding the emergency rooms and urgent cares with symptoms of food born illnesses and food poisoning.

The warm weather is perfect for bacteria to multiply quickly on food that is not handled properly or kept at ideal temperatures. Each year, millions of people in the United States get sick from contaminated food (<https://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/symptoms/symptoms.html>).

Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramping.

Dehydration is a major concern for patients that reach out to a triage nurse complaining of these symptoms after attending an outdoor event with food.

Triage Nurses must remember to ask patients about their recent activities, including food consumption when they are calling with any of the above symptoms.

Asking “what were you doing before your symptoms started?” or “Have you attended any outdoor activities that involved food, such as a barbecue or family reunion?” may help to determine if the patient’s symptoms could be related to spoiled food.

Knowing the potential cause of the patient’s symptoms is helpful and can aid in the triage nurse being able to reassure the patient but it is the severity of the symptoms that the nurse will need to determine to guide her patient to the right level of care.

Some cases of food poisoning are mild and can be treated at home with such measures as clear liquids and rest while other symptoms such as severe vomiting and/or diarrhea or signs of dehydration may need to be treated in an urgent care or emergency room.

Here are some tips to pass on to consumers to help keep them safe while enjoying outdoor gatherings.

- Be sure to keep food refrigerated or frozen from the time it is prepared until it reaches the outdoor destination.
- Use ice or frozen gel packs to keep food cool.
- Cold foods should be stored at 40 F or below to prevent bacteria growth.
- Hot food should be kept at 140F or above
- Once you have served a food, it should not sit out for longer than 2 hours or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 F.
- Keep cold dishes in a shallow tub of ice to help keep them cool longer
- Pack meats, poultry and seafood while still frozen so they stay colder longer.
- Keep raw meats wrapped securely and away from other foods to avoid cross contamination.
- Clean and rinse your fruits and vegetables before packing them in the cooler.
- Consider buying “ready-to-eat” or “washed” fruits and vegetables.

Sources:

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm109899.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/family/camping/index.htm>