

# Summer Food Safety

WARMER WEATHER BRINGS to mind thoughts of outdoor fun – picnics, boating, hikes and trips to the lakes and ocean. When planning these activities, food safety should be a top priority. According to [homefoodsafety.org](http://homefoodsafety.org), approximately 48 million people per year experience some type of food poisoning, and over 128,000 are hospitalized. Even worse, more than 3,000 people each year die from food-related illness. These are summer memories nobody wants. Helping clients understand the hazards of foodborne illness and avoiding possible legal repercussions is another value-added service of the professional insurance agent.

Food in the open can spoil more quickly in the summer. [USDA.gov](http://USDA.gov) tells us there are two reasons for this: bacteria grows fastest in temperatures from 90 to 100 degrees, and when it is wet. Hot humid days of summer are the perfect recipe for food disaster. According to [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov), a good rule of thumb is to never leave food unrefrigerated more than two hours. When the temperature reaches 90 degrees, this time period should be no more than one hour.

If you are packing a cooler with ice and food, be sure to store the food, especially raw meat, in watertight containers to avoid contact with the melting ice. It is better to pack food and beverages separately, as the beverage cooler will be opened more often and cause the contents to warm up faster. Pack a separate platter for the cooked meat. Food should be kept at 40 degrees or cooler to ensure safety.

**According to [mayoclinic.gov](http://mayoclinic.gov), safe temperatures range from 140 °F for solid items such as steak and fish to 160 °F for ground meat and 165 °F for poultry.**



Grills and cooking grates can harbor both creatures, such as bee and wasp nests, and bacteria. Use care when uncovering the grill to avoid being stung. Nests can be built quickly, so check every time you use the grill. Be sure to heat up the grill before cooking.

If your picnic site does not have clean water, be sure to bring some. When handling raw meat, clean your hands before and after.

Wash utensils and dishes used for raw food before using again for cooked items. Hand sanitizers and wipes are an essential component of any outing. Use a thermometer to ensure that the food is properly cooked. According to [mayoclinic.gov](http://mayoclinic.gov), safe temperatures range from 140 °F for solid items such as steak and fish to 160 °F for ground meat and 165 °F for poultry.

Fishing is another popular activity in warmer weather. Nothing tastes better than fresh fish, but if you plan to eat what you catch, check first with local authorities to be sure you are fishing in safe areas. Safe storage of your catch is another important consideration. Live fish can be kept on a stringer or in a container as long as they have enough room to move and breathe. If you are not keeping them alive, then fish should be cleaned and gutted as soon as possible. Keep fish on ice in watertight packaging. Alternating layers of fish and ice is preferable. Cook the fish within one or two days or freeze them. Shellfish, such as lobster, crabs and clams, should be kept alive until they are cooked.

Summer is time for fun and relaxation – the only fireworks should be those in the sky, and not in a courtroom. Helping clients avoid lawsuits for injuries or illnesses due to food poisoning is another sign of the true insurance professional.

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