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# How Do I Keep My Food Safe During Picnics and Camping Trips?

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**A weekly question/answer column**

**How Do I Keep My Food Safe During Picnics and Camping Trips?**

*Charlotte Brennand\* answers:*

Every summer there is an increase in the number of foodborne illnesses. The incidence of food poisoning appears to be greater this time of year when the weather is warm and food is often transported. To prevent food poisoning, consider these tips:

- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. The general rule is not to let perishable foods remain at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees for more than 2 hours. If you are in doubt, it is best to throw the food away.
- Chill food thoroughly prior to leaving home and then transport it in an ice chest. Leftovers should be returned to the ice chest right after serving. Large blocks of ice such as water frozen in milk cartons will keep the ice chest cold longer than loose ice will. Cartons of juice can be frozen before trips and will help keep other foods cold. Coolers will retain their temperature longer if transported in the passenger section of the car instead of the trunk, and also if they are stored under a shade tree rather than in direct sun. They can also be covered with a blanket for extra insulation. If a cooler is not available, choose foods that last without refrigeration such as fruits and vegetables, dried or canned meats, hard cheese, crackers, and breads.
- Hot foods can be placed in thermos containers, or for short periods of time, pans can be wrapped in towels or blankets to maintain their heat. On camping trips, reheat cooked foods thoroughly. The majority of foodborne pathogens are killed by heat.
- Avoid cross contamination. Place meat and poultry products in leakproof containers. If meat juices leak into the cooler, don't eat the ice. Cutting boards and utensils used for raw meat should be thoroughly cleaned before using for cooked meat or other foods. Hands should always be washed before handling and preparing food or eating finger foods. It may be helpful to prepare some of the food at home. For example, meat can be precut and then packaged before transporting. Items such as spaghetti sauce can be cooked at home, then transported either chilled or frozen. Produce keeps longer if it is not presliced.

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\* Charlotte Brennand is Utah State University Extension Food Safety Specialist