

NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Marks National Food Safety Education Month in September

Basic precautions can help you avoid foodborne illness at your Labor Day cookout or fall football tailgate party

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding Illinoisans to pay attention to the safe handling and preparation of food. September is National Food Safety Education Month (sometimes also referred to as Food Safety Awareness Month). It’s also a time for numerous gatherings like Labor Day weekend cookouts or football tailgate parties, events that could be ruined by unsanitary practices.

“Fall in Illinois is synonymous with food and football,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “As Labor Day approaches, marking the unofficial end of summer, IDPH is commemorating Food Education Safety Month this September and encouraging our residents to follow simple rules for handling and preparing food to ensure safety and prevent illness.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that annually, 48 million people in the U.S. – roughly one in six Americans -- contract some form of foodborne illness, resulting in symptoms that can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, fever, and chills. Of those cases, 128,000 lead to hospitalization, and an estimated 3,000 deaths annually are attributed to foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness is preventable when you follow the basic safety guidelines – clean, separate, cook, and chill:

- **Clean:** Wash your hands and surfaces frequently.
 - Germs that cause food poisoning can survive in many places and spread easily. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water or cold water before, during, and after preparing and before eating.
 - Make sure everything touching food is clean, including hands, surfaces, cutting boards, utensils, and coolers.
 - Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.

- **Separate:** Don’t cross-contaminate.

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- Raw meat, chicken and other poultry, seafood and eggs can spread germs to ready-to-eat food unless you keep them separate.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood and eggs separate from ready-to-eat foods while shopping and when storing them in a refrigerator or cooler.
- Use separate cutting boards and plates for fruits and vegetables and for raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
- **Cook:** Cooked food is safe only after it's been heated to a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria.
 - The only way to tell if food is safely cooked is to use a food thermometer.
 - Use a food thermometer to check if foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Different foods have different minimum cooking temperatures for safety. Use this chart to make sure you cook to the proper temperature: [Safe Minimum Internal Temperature Chart | Food Safety and Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/food-safety/minimum-internal-temperature-chart).
- **Chill:** Refrigerate food promptly.
 - Raw meat and poultry, and cooked leftovers need to be chilled promptly to prevent bacteria from growing.
 - Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90F.
 - Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for fast cooling.

In addition, it's recommended to ask guests about food allergies and be aware of the nine major food allergens (milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and sesame), including reading food labels and separating foods containing allergens.

You can learn more about food safety education at [Food Safety \(illinois.gov\)](https://www.illinois.gov/food-safety). IDPH also offers food safety information and coloring pages for kids in a downloadable format at [ABCs of FOOD SAFETY \(illinois.gov\)](https://www.illinois.gov/food-safety/abc-of-food-safety).

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