

Top Five Mistakes People Make Everyday in the Kitchen

May is the kick off to grilling season!

The good news is that our food is safer than ever. The government recently reported that foodborne illnesses are decreasing significantly, and America's beef producers have played an important role in making this happen. Systems from the farm all the way to the grocery store help keep our food safe.

Even though the risk is extremely low, by following a few food safety tips, we can help reduce the risk even further.

First, before you begin cooking it's important to remember to wash your hands, cutting boards and utensils with hot, soapy water before and after handling meat. This is an important step to take to reduce foodborne illness in your home, but there are a lot of other mistakes people are making each and every day. So as you fire up those grills and start inviting people over, consider the top five most common food safety mistakes that people make in the kitchen every day.

Mistake #1: Guessing when your meat is properly cooked

The most accurate way to ensure that your meat is safely cooked is to use a food-safe meat thermometer. Insert an ovenproof meat thermometer into the thickest part of the meat. An instant read one is the easiest – it registers in just a few seconds! For burgers, make sure the temperature rises to 160 degrees F, which means medium-doneness. Steaks and seafood need to reach 145 degrees F. Chicken should be cooked to 180 degrees F (chicken breast, 170 degrees; ground poultry, 165 degrees F).

Mistake #2: Creating a “Danger Zone” in your kitchen

The “Danger Zone” is between 40F and 140F. The solution here is to always remember the chef's mantra: keep hot food hot and cold food cold. It's important to set your refrigerator at a cold enough temperature (40 F or less) to discourage the growth of food borne bacteria.

Mistake #3: Defrosting at room temperature

We all freeze our meat to keep it fresh longer; the problem comes in when you defrost it. Remember “The Thaw Law.” Never defrost your food at room temperature. The best, safest way to defrost is to thaw food in your refrigerator.

Mistake #4: Mixing up the marinade

It's important to remember the marinating mandate: once the marinade has been in contact with uncooked meat, poultry or seafood, it must be brought to a rolling boil before it can be used as a sauce. Boiling the marinade will kill any bacteria. If you don't plan on reusing your marinade, throw it out.

Mistake #5: Separation anxiety

It's important not to stuff your leftovers into a large container. Leftovers should be stored in shallow containers (two inches or less) for quick cooling and to prevent the build up of bacteria. In a large container, food takes a longer to cool, which is long enough for bacteria to grow. Make sure you freeze or refrigerate your perishable leftovers within two hours or less. Never allow leftovers to cool to room temperature before refrigerating them.

Have a happy and safe grilling season!