

# UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

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## Summer Food Safety

Believe it or not, the official start of the summer season is just around the corner. For many of us this means grilling out, picnics, camping, and my personal favorite: homemade ice cream. Unfortunately, the increase in these activities puts us all at an increased risk for something that isn't much fun: foodborne illness.

More commonly known as food poisoning, foodborne illness will affect one in four individuals every year. Those at the greatest risk are the very young, the elderly, and pregnant women, along with anyone with depressed immune system function. Symptoms like cramping, vomiting, and diarrhea usually occur within 72 hours, but can lay dormant for weeks in some cases!

Fortunately, most cases of foodborne illness can be prevented by following a few simple rules.

**Rule #1: Wash your hands!** This simple step greatly reduces the chances of spreading dangerous bacteria or viruses to food. If soap and water is not available try to do your best with antibacterial wipes or hand sanitizer. Make sure to always clean up after using the restroom or handling potentially hazardous foods like meat or eggs.

**Rule #2: Keep hot foods hot, cold foods cold.** Bacteria can multiply quickly under the right conditions, and they love the hot, humid days of summer. Foods should only sit in the 'danger zone' (40-140°F) for two hours. If sitting in temperatures greater than 90°F, food needs to be refrigerated or thrown out after only one hour! Pack your cooler with enough ice to keep foods cold, and try to minimize how often it is opened.

**Rule #3: Separate, don't cross-contaminate.** Make sure meats are well wrapped if you will be transporting them in a cooler, and keep cutting boards and knives separate. Use a clean plate to serve foods from the grill, never re-use something that has held any type of raw meat.

**Rule #4: Know your temperatures.** Different types of meats need to be cooked to different temperatures before they can be safely eaten. You can't tell if meat has been cooked properly simply by looking at it! For further tips on correct temperatures and how to use a meat thermometer please visit [www.IsItDoneYet.gov](http://www.IsItDoneYet.gov).

**Rule #5: Wash your produce—even fruits like cantaloupe and watermelon.** Your knife will just push all the outer germs to the inside of a melon if it hasn't been washed properly first.

As for that homemade ice cream—look for an eggless recipe, or one that uses a cooked custard base. If your favorite recipe calls for raw eggs try to use pasteurized shell eggs or pasteurized egg substitutes. You should be able to find these in the dairy case of your grocery store near the regular eggs.

While most cases of foodborne illness are mild, some can be severe and even life-threatening! Please keep these rules in mind to keep your family and friends safe this summer season. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at [kwillis3@uwyo.edu](mailto:kwillis3@uwyo.edu).*