



K-State Extension Connection

Time to Grill? Think Food Safety First

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The summer grilling season is here and many are enjoying wonderful meals prepared on their backyard grill. Burgers, hot dogs and steaks are among grilling favorites, and cooking them to the correct level of doneness is critical to prevent foodborne illness.

“A food thermometer should be your best friend,” according to Karen Blakeslee, food safety specialist and coordinator of the Kansas State University’s Rapid Response Center. **“You should never determine meat doneness based on color. Use a food thermometer and make sure meat is cooked to the recommended minimum internal temperature,”** she cautioned.



For the three most common types of grilled meats, those recommendations include:

- Steaks, chops and roasts – 145 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Ground meat – 160 F.
- All poultry – 165 F.

Blakeslee said a food thermometer should be inserted into the center of the thickest part of the meat, away from bone, fat and gristle. For ground meat – such as hamburger patties – insert into the side so that the thermometer is positioned through the center of the food.

“There are many types of thermometers to choose from when cooking,” Blakeslee said. “For checking food temperature, a digital or dial food thermometer is best. Digital temperatures can sense temperature at the tip of the probe and give a quick temperature response.”

She cautioned that digital thermometers cannot be left in the food during cooking.

“Other food thermometers have a temperature probe connected to a separate digital display. If grilling, use one designated for the high heat of grilling. For large cuts of meat – such as roasts – a meat thermometer can be inserted into the roast and left in during cooking.”

Blakeslee lists several other food safety tips as folks gear up for outdoor grilling:

- Use separate plates and utensils for raw meats and cooked meats.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods should be maintained at a temperature above 140 F, while cold foods should be kept below 40 F.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after handling raw foods, before and during meal preparation, and before eating.
- Prepare several ice chests to keep food cold and to separate items. Keep beverages in one chest, ready-to-eat foods in another, and raw meats in a third.
- Do not wash meat or poultry before cooking. This increases the chance for cross-contamination and is not necessary. Cooking meat to the proper internal temperature is your best defense.

Some non-food safety tips include positioning the grill away from flammable areas, checking the charcoal or gas supply so you don't run out while preparing meals, and keeping children and pets away from a hot grill.

Blakeslee said K-State Research and Extension has published a comprehensive guide to safe food handling, titled "At-Home Safe Food Handling: It's in Your Hands." This publication can be downloaded for free at: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF2465.pdf>.

In addition you may check out the "Food Safety Tips for Grilling, Tailgating and Picnics" website at: <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/foodsafety/topics/outdoor.html>.

"Plan ahead to keep the party simple," Blakeslee said. "If you are having guests over, ask them to bring other menu items or supplies such as utensils, plates and beverages. The main goal is to have fun."

Find more information about these topics and others, by contacting the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district.

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