



Jeb Bush  
Governor

John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H.  
Secretary

**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Enjoy good health with these*  
**Summer Food Safety Tips**

Every year, we hear the same advice: Handle food carefully in the summer because foodborne illness - also known as "food poisoning" - is more common in warm weather.

*It's true. Foodborne illnesses increase during the summer for two main reasons.* First, there are the "**natural causes.**" Most foodborne bacteria grow fastest at hot temperatures (from 90 to 110 °F). Bacteria also need moisture to flourish, and our Florida summers are both hot and humid. So the "natural causes" are very active in the summer.

Second, there are the "**people causes**" for the increase in summer foodborne illnesses. Outdoor activities increase during summer months as more people are cooking outside at picnics, barbecues, and on camping trips. Outdoors, the safety controls that a kitchen provides — thermostat-controlled cooking, refrigeration, and washing facilities — are not usually available.

While we know that foodborne illness increases in warm weather, we also know that consumers can *Fight BAC!*<sup>TM</sup> by following these **four simple steps to keeping food safer in the summertime**:

**1. Clean:** Unwashed hands and surfaces are a prime cause of foodborne illness. Wash your hands thoroughly with hot, soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.

**2. Separate:** Cross-contamination during preparing, grilling, and serving food is a prime cause of foodborne illness. When packing the cooler for an outing, wrap raw meat securely; keep raw meat juices from coming in contact with ready-to-eat food. Wash plates, utensils, and cutting boards that held the raw meat or poultry before using them again for cooked food.

**(MORE)**



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**3. Cook:** Food is properly cooked when it is heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria. Take your food thermometer along. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often brown very fast on the *outside*, so be sure that meat is cooked thoroughly on the *inside*. Check it with a food thermometer. Cook meat and poultry completely at the picnic site. Partially cooking food ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that cooking later on cannot destroy them.

**4. Chill:** Keeping food at an unsafe temperature is a prime cause of foodborne illness. Keep cold food cold! Cold refrigerated perishable food like lunch meat, cooked meat, chicken, and potato or pasta salad should be kept in an insulated cooler packed with ice cubes, ice packs, or containers of frozen water. Consider packing beverages in one cooler and perishable food in another cooler because the beverage cooler will be opened frequently.

**Leftovers?** Food left out of refrigeration for more than two hours may not be safe to eat. When the temperature is 90 °F or above, food should not be left out for more than one hour. And, when in doubt, throw it out!

**For more food safety information**, visit [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org). or call the toll-free USDA Hotline at (800) 535-4555; (TTY) (800) 256-7072. It is staffed weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. An extensive selection of food safety recordings can be heard 24 hours a day using a touch-tone phone.

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*  
[www.PinellasHealth.com](http://www.PinellasHealth.com)