



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

KEEPING YOUR FOOD SAFE

SUMMARY

Food-borne illnesses peak during the summer months due to a variety of factors, including warmer temperatures and improper food handling. Keep your meals and your Scouts safe while participating in hikes, campouts, and other outdoor activities with careful menu planning and by following safe food handling practices. Remember the three “C’s” to keep your food safe: Keep it COLD, keep it CLEAN, and COOK it thoroughly.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Acute gastroenteritis (<https://medlineplus.gov/gastroenteritis.html>) is the most common infectious disease encountered when camping. Symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal cramps may begin to appear hours to days after ingestion.

Keep it cold: Bacteria are slow to grow in temperatures below 40 degrees F or above 140 degrees F. The temperature range in between is known as the danger zone where bacteria can multiply rapidly. Since a heat source is usually unavailable to transport foods, it’s best to start with perishable foods chilled or frozen, then packed with plenty of ice, frozen gel packs, or frozen juice boxes.

Keep it clean: Start with clean hands by utilizing soap and water or disposable wipes before handling food. Wash fruits and vegetables before cutting them on a clean surface. Avoid cross-contamination by never allowing raw meat, poultry, or their juices to come into contact with fresh or prepared foods. Keep all raw and cooked meat, poultry, or fish separate and always wash hands properly after handling. Use only a clean water source to wash hands, dishes, and fresh fruits and vegetables. If water is not available, properly using hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol can help to reduce the number of microbes in most situations. But hand sanitizer does not eliminate all germs. Correct hand washing remains the best way to prevent illnesses from being transmitted. Also, remember in the backcountry to follow recommended water treatment protocols when rehydrating food, cooking, or drinking.

Cook it thoroughly: Many Scouts are cooking on their own for the first time. It can be difficult to determine doneness of meat and poultry as color is not a good indicator. Meat can harbor dangerous bacteria. A digital meat thermometer is a good tool to have in the chuck box and to use when cooking meat, poultry, and fish. The references listed below provide safe minimum internal temperatures. Be sure to clean your thermometer between uses.

REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Keep Food Safe—Summer and Vacations”:
www.foodsafety.gov/keep/events/summervacations/
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “Foodborne Illnesses: What You Need to Know”:
www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm103263.htm
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives”:
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>
- *Boy Scout Handbook*, Chapter 10
- *Cooking* merit badge pamphlet