

Football season is well under way, which means its tailgating season! Spending time with friends, sports, music, and tasty food are all the excitement when fall arrives. And did I mention the great food? Barbeques are the main attraction for many tailgaters (Ok, so maybe the football is the main attraction but the food is still vital). Nevertheless, if you are going to have barbeques at your tailgating parties this year, you should know how to properly prepare, cook and store the delicious items that you will be serving to your family and guests.

To start, you need to make sure that the food you are bringing to the tailgating location is kept at a safe temperature along the ride. It is a good idea to pack several inches of ice in the bottom of your insulated cooler to keep cold items cold. Perishable, cold items such as hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad, and chicken, need to stay at a chilly temperature to prevent bacteria growth. A thermometer can be placed in the cooler to be sure that your food stays at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. If you are planning to bring hot food, you should also plan for it to be eaten within 2 hours of purchase or within one hour if it is warmer than 90 degrees Fahrenheit outside.

Cooking the food is the fun part however; this is also where many tailgaters can make mistakes. First, it is NOT safe to partially cook meat or poultry before taking it to the tailgating location. Partially cooking food allows bacteria to survive and multiply which could lead to food borne illness (food poisoning). The only time that partially cooking food is considered safe is when the food goes directly from the microwave or stove to the hot grill. Once the meat is on the grill, it needs to cook to a specific temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. A meat thermometer should be used to measure the temperature of the center of the hamburger, sausage, chicken breast, etc. Minimum recommended temperatures are listed below for each type of meat. It is also recommended that you allow your meat to rest for 3 minutes after cooking.

- 145 degrees Fahrenheit- raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops and roasts.
- 160 degrees Fahrenheit- Raw ground beef, pork, lamb and veal.
- 165 degrees Fahrenheit- ALL poultry.

Once the meat is cooked thoroughly, use clean utensils and plates to transfer it from the grill to the table. DO NOT use the same utensils or plates that touched the raw meat. If you are fortunate enough to have leftovers, make sure you get it to the refrigerator or cooler within two hours or one hour if it is warmer than 90 degrees Fahrenheit outside.

If you have any questions about food safety, please feel free to contact the Hocking County Health Department at 740.385.3030. Have a safe and enjoyable tailgating season!