It’s That Time of the Year

By: Katrina Kirby

Bright, colorful fireworks bursting in the sky, children’s laughter at noon, the pungent scent of chlorine, and frequent outdoor events are all reminders that summer time is among us. One of the most popular outdoor activities around this time is the beloved cookouts.

Growing up as a young girl, I remember standing in the line waiting on those special hotdogs at the cookouts. You know which one’s I’m talking about. The good old hotdog with just enough crisp on it to not be completely destroyed.

Well no longer a young girl, but a wiser more informed person. Now instead of just indulging, I ask myself is this good for me? I never in a thousand years would think about that hotdog and cancer in the same sentence. Guess what? According to research there are things we can do to help reduce our risk of certain diseases such as cancer, heart disease and other chronic conditions.

So does Grilling Pose a Cancer Risk?
Some studies suggest there may be a cancer risk related to eating food cooked by high-heat cooking techniques as grilling, frying, and broiling. Based on present research findings, eating moderate amounts of grilled meats like fish, meat, and poultry cooked — without charring — to a safe temperature does not pose a problem.
To prevent charring, remove visible fat that can cause a flare-up. Precook meat in the microwave immediately before placing it on the grill to release some of the juices that can drop on coals. Cook food in the center of the grill and move coals to the side to prevent fat and juices from dripping on them. Cut charred portions off the meat.
It’s important to follow certain guidelines to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying and causing foodborne illnesses according to USDA. I would like to share some useful facts regarding food safety and barbecuing to bring into your home this season.

*Buy cold food like meat and poultry last, right before checkout.
*Separate raw meat and poultry from other food in your shopping cart. To guard against cross-contamination
*Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. Refrigerate within 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.
*At home, place meat and poultry in the refrigerator immediately. Freeze poultry and ground meat that won’t be used in 1 or 2 days; freeze other meat within 4 to 5 days.
*Thaw Safely
*Marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Poultry and cubed meat or stew meat can be marinated up to 2 days. Beef, veal, pork, and lamb roasts, chops, and steaks may be marinated up to 5 days. If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade before putting raw meat and poultry in it. However, if the marinade used on raw meat or
poultry is to be reused, make sure to let it come to a boil first to destroy any harmful bacteria.

* When carrying food to another location, keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth.
* Keep meat and poultry refrigerated until ready to use. Only take out the meat and poultry that will immediately be placed on the grill.
* When using a cooler, keep it out of the direct sun by placing it in the shade or shelter. Avoid opening the lid too often, which lets cold air out and warm air in. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishables in a separate cooler.
* Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters. To prevent foodborne illness, don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and poultry and their juices can contaminate safely cooked food.
* If you're eating away from home, find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning. Or pack clean cloths, and moist towelettes for cleaning surfaces and hands.
* Precooking food partially in the microwave, oven, or stove is a good way of reducing grilling time. Just make sure that the food goes immediately on the preheated grill to complete cooking.
* Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature.
* For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat to higher temperatures.
* NEVER partially grill meat or poultry and finish cooking later.
* When reheating fully cooked meats like hot dogs, grill to 165 °F or until steaming hot.

**Keep Hot Food Hot**

* After cooking meat and poultry on the grill; keep it hot until served — at 140 °F or warmer.
* Keep cooked meats hot by setting them to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals where they could overcook.
* At home, the cooked meat can be kept hot in an oven set at approximately 200 °F, in a chafing dish or slow cooker, or on a warming tray.
* When taking food off the grill, use a clean platter. Don't put cooked food on the same platter that held raw meat or poultry. Any harmful bacteria present in the raw meat juices could contaminate safely cooked food.
* In hot weather (above 90 °F), food should never sit out for more than 1 hour.
* Refrigerate any leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Discard any food left out more than 2 hours (1 hour if temperatures are above 90 °F).
* Smoking is cooking food indirectly in the presence of a fire. It can be done in a covered grill if a pan of water is placed beneath the meat or poultry on the grill; and meats can be smoked in a "smoker," which is an outdoor cooker especially designed for smoking foods.

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http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Barbecue_Food_Safety/

Katrina Kirby is a Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent with the Petersburg office of Virginia Cooperative Extension. The Extensions Agent’s mission is to teach Virginians how to improve their quality of life through providing education on various topics such as: Preventing chronic diseases with a healthy diet, identifying quality childcare, planning for home ownership, making good parenting
decisions, handling food safely, being a wise grocery shopper, managing finances successfully, preparing for and coping with disasters.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (www.ext.vt.edu/) brings the resources of Virginia’s land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth. Through a system of on-campus specialists and locally based agents, it delivers education in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, community viability, and 4-H youth development. With a network of faculty at two universities, 107 county and city offices, 13 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers, Virginia Cooperative Extension provides solutions to the problems facing Virginians today.

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