



It's the time for food-borne illness

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As the song says, “it’s summer time and the living is easy...” as it should be. This

is the time of year we look forward to all winter. Summer is the time for the beach and park, camping and cooking and eating outdoors. Could it be any better? For anyone afflicted by food poisoning, the answer is obvious.

Unfortunately, the relaxed times of summer also bring lax attention to food safety. The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) reports that summer months are a time of increase for avoidable food-borne infections. They come from bacteria like as Salmonella, E-coli and Campylobacter. Lynn Wilcott, from the Food Protection Services of the BCCDC, explains that these “increases can be attributed to a variety of causes, including food handling and cooking practices and purchasing foods from unapproved sources.”

Indeed, already in 2010 “between May and the middle of June, we have seen 81 cases of Salmonella and 15 cases of E. coli in the province,” adds Wilcott.

The symptoms of food poisoning are myriad: stomach cramps, chills, fever, dizziness, nausea, headaches, vomiting and diarrhea. These usually go away after one to three days, but serious cases of food poisoning can result in prolonged sickness and even death.

Because food poisoning is often confused with stomach flu, it is widely under-reported. The American Dietetic Association indicates that about a quarter of all food-borne illness arises because of poor food

handling and preparation in the home. The two most common mistakes? Not cooking the food to the proper temperature, and failing to wash hands.

Fighting the bacteria that cause food-borne illness is simple enough. Just follow the four Cs of food safety:

CLEAN: Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap. And clean surfaces often. Do not **CROSS CONTAMINATE:** This means not using the same utensils, plates or cutting surfaces for raw meat and raw vegetables or cooked meat. **COOK** using a meat thermometer to ensure foods are sufficiently cooked. That means hamburgers reach an internal temperature of 71°C and chicken

to an internal temperature of 74°C. **CHILL:** Refrigerate food promptly. Do not leave potato salad or salads containing eggs or mayonnaise at room temperature for longer than two hours.

If you are taking your feast with you to the park or campground, take additional precautions. Packing the cooler is the key. Start with cold food (chilled well before departure) in a sanitized cooler packed with ice or ice packs. Use a separate cooler for drinks as the food cooler should be opened only when needed, not with every drink. Follow the four Cs. And bring along hand sanitizer or moist towelettes to keep hands clean.

Food-borne illness is avoidable — don’t let it ruin your summer activity. To find out more about food safety, visit [BCCDC Food Safety](#) online, or the [BC Health Files](#). And have a terrific summer!

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