

When it Comes to Food Safety at Tailgates, Americans Aren't Scoring Points
American Dietetic Association and ConAgra Foods Provide Tips for a Winning Season
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CHICAGO -- This season, thousands of sports fans will gather an average of five times throughout the fall and winter to tackle a favorite American past time -- tailgating. A recent American Dietetic Association (ADA) and ConAgra Foods Foundation survey shows that most tailgaters risk spoiling the fun by inviting a particularly challenging opponent to the game -- food poisoning.

“Just as professional football players prepare for the big game with special equipment and safety precautions, tailgaters nationwide need proper food-handling techniques and tools to score high points at pre-game parties,” said Carolyn O’Neil, registered dietitian and national spokesperson for the ADA/ConAgra Foods Home Food Safety program.

Pre-Game Show

According to the ADA/ConAgra Foods Foundation survey, nearly 60 percent of Americans prepare their tailgating treats at home. That means before pulling out of the driveway, fans should make sure food is packed in a well-insulated cooler with ice or ice packs to maintain a safe storage temperature of below 40 °F. When taking a road trip lasting more than two hours -- as 16 percent of tailgaters do -- transport the cooler in the back seat of an air- conditioned car instead of the trunk. This holds true for car rides in hot weather when temperatures are above 90 °F.

Note that in cool-weather climates, this rule is reversed: transport coolers in the trunk (rather than in a heated car) where foods will benefit from the frequently chilly temperatures outside.

Where’s the Safety?

When tailgating, 70 percent of those surveyed said they never use a refrigerator thermometer inside the cooler to ensure foods are stored at a safe temperature. Yet, 60 percent of tailgaters bring popular perishable items such as potato salad, cole slaw and pasta salad -- protein-based favorites that can easily spoil without proper refrigeration.

More than half (54 percent) will pack crowd-pleasers like burgers, bratwurst and chicken that require testing with a meat thermometer to ensure doneness. But, with nearly 60 percent (57 percent) never using a meat thermometer, most tailgaters run the risk of eating unsafe meat at their gathering.

Don’t let your meal be intercepted by food poisoning -- cook burgers and brats to a minimum of 160 °F and chicken to 170 °F.

Overtime Play

Not all tailgating takes place before kick-off. In fact, 60 percent of tailgaters say they recycle pre-game goodies to serve and eat again during their post-game celebrations. “Eating foods that have been left unrefrigerated for more than two hours or in a cooler not kept at below 40 °F is a major fumble,” said O’Neil. “Remember, when in doubt, throw it out.”

Extra Points

Whether a rookie to the “sport” or among the 80 percent of tailgaters who hit the parking lot up to five times a season, follow these simple tips from the ADA and ConAgra Foods to guarantee a win while tailgating:

- Wash hands before, during and after preparing food for a tailgate.
- Sing your favorite team’s fight song while lathering with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Be sure to pack moist towelettes to clean up before digging in.
- Always defrost meats in the refrigerator or in the microwave at home -- never after arriving at the tailgating. Then, tightly seal raw or thawed meat in plastic wrap to prevent juices from contaminating other food items.
- Consider packing meat products in one cooler and additional foods in another.
- Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate. Pack extra or color-coded plates or utensils to help prevent cross-contamination while grilling and preparing side dishes. Use one set for raw foods and another for cooked foods.
- Always use a meat thermometer. Keep a refrigerator thermometer inside the cooler at all times to monitor the temperature.
- Don’t forget that carryout and/or pre-prepared foods are also susceptible to food poisoning.
- Throw away perishable tailgate items before entering the game. Foods should not be left outside for more than two hours. In hot weather (90 °F or above) this time is reduced to one hour.

Take Control of Home Food Safety

The ADA/ConAgra Foods Home Food Safety ... It’s in Your Hands® program educates consumers that home food safety is a serious issue and provides solutions so Americans can easily and safely handle food in their own kitchens. This program complements government-sponsored food safety initiatives that speak to the leading critical food-handling violations by emphasizing the following four key messages: 1) Wash hands often; 2) Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate; 3) Cook to proper temperatures; 4) Refrigerate promptly below 40 °F.

For more information, visit www.homefoodsafety.org or call ADA’s Consumer Nutrition Information Line at 800/366-1655, where recorded messages (in both English and Spanish) are available 24 hours a day. With nearly 70,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation’s largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Chicago-based ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. Visit ADA at www.eatright.org.

Plan a Good Defense For Safe Food at Tailgate Parties

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USDA FSIS News Release

Jimmy C. Liu

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/foodborne>

WASHINGTON - Don't give bacteria a sporting chance at your football tailgate gathering. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reminds consumers that although tailgating is a cool weather activity in most areas of the country, it still requires the same safe food handling practices as summer picnicking. It takes a good defense to keep harmful foodborne bacteria from sending guests to the locker room.

There's nothing more American than tailgating and football. Food and football have long been paired for fall festivities. In fact, "gridiron" -- the nickname for the football field -- comes from a grate used for grilling food. So this fall, if you'll be grilling your "pigskin," make sure you've got the right equipment to defeat bacteria. Keeping food safe at parties takes a team effort.

"No matter what team you're rooting for, make sure you plan a good defense for keeping food safe at tailgate parties," said Dr. Elsa A. Murano, USDA under secretary for food safety. "Following the four food safety steps will ensure all tailgaters enjoy safe food."

Throughout food preparation and serving, the Partnership for Food Safety Education's Fight BAC![®] campaign advises to:

- Clean. Clean the food thermometer after use and use clean serving plates, utensils, etc.
- Separate. Separate raw meat and poultry from cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Cook. Raw meat and poultry need to be cooked thoroughly.
- Chill. Store leftovers in the cooler within 2 hours of taking food off of the grill. When the temperature is above 90° F, store food in a cooler within 1 hour.

The Game Plan

Keeping food safe from home to stadium helps prevent foodborne illness. The game plan should include packing for a situation where a refrigerator, stove, and running water are probably not available. Include lots of clean utensils, not only for eating but also for serving the safely cooked food.

In addition to a grill and fuel for cooking food, pack a food thermometer to be sure the meat, poultry, and casseroles reach a high enough temperature to destroy harmful bacteria that may be present.

Keep hot food hot. If bringing hot take-out food, eat it within 2 hours of purchase. Or plan ahead and chill the food in your refrigerator before packing for your tailgate. To keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot, use an insulated container. Fill the container with boiling water, let it stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed to keep the food hot (140 °F or above) for several hours.

Carry cold perishable food like raw hamburger patties, sausages, and chicken in an insulated cooler packed with several inches of ice, frozen gel packs, or containers of frozen water. Perishable cooked food such as luncheon meat, cooked meat, chicken, and potato or pasta salads must be kept refrigerator cold, too. When packing the cooler for an outing, be sure raw meat and poultry are wrapped securely to prevent their juices from cross-contaminating ready-to-eat food.

Find out if there's a source of potable (drinkable) water. If not, bring water for cleaning. Pack clean, wet, disposable cloths or moist towelettes and paper towels for cleaning hands and surfaces.

The Play-by-Play

At the tailgate party, it's important to keep hot food hot and cold food cold. Bacteria multiply rapidly between 40 °F and 140 °F. Never leave food in this "danger zone" more than 2 hours (1 hour when the outside temperature is above 90 °F). Cook meat and poultry completely. Partial cooking of food ahead of time allows bacteria to multiply to the point that subsequent cooking cannot destroy them.

Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, so check using a food thermometer to be sure they are cooked thoroughly. Cook hamburgers, sausage, and other ground meats (veal, lamb, and pork) to an internal temperature of 160 °F and ground poultry to 165 °F. Beef, veal and lamb steaks and roasts may be cooked to 145 °F for medium rare. Poultry breast meat should be cooked to 170 °F and dark meat to 180 °F. All cuts of pork should reach 160 °F.

The Wrap-Up

Some people have so much fun at tailgate gatherings; they never actually make it into the stadium to see the football game. But that doesn't mean it's safe for the food to stay unrefrigerated before, during, and after the game. Store food in the cooler except for brief times when serving. Cook only the amount of food that will be eaten to avoid the challenge of keeping leftovers at a safe temperature. Discard any leftovers that are not ice cold after the game. Food should not be left out of the cooler or off the grill more than 2 hours (1 hour when the outside temperature is above 90 °F). Holding food at an unsafe temperature is a prime cause of foodborne illness.