

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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September is National Food Safety Education Month!

Are you ready to be educated about food safety? We certainly hear enough about outbreaks of food poisoning in the news. It seems they spread from one side of the country to the other as the media report all the details they can find. So what are you doing about it? If you're like many people, they start avoiding foods. Spinach in the news? No more spinach! Chicken in the news? No more chicken! That could seriously limit your diet, and still not keep you safe.

Avoiding foods that have been tied to an outbreak only limits your risk if you've been eating in the same places or buying from the same manufacturer. Once there's an outbreak you can be sure that there will be lots of inspections, lots of clean up and lots of changes. So that food often becomes very safe.

But there's other reason that avoiding certain foods because of previous problems doesn't keep us safe. It ignores the fact that many, many food borne illnesses never get reported or hit the news because they occur in the home. Many illnesses are caused by mishandling foods in our own kitchens. If we don't put the chicken in the refrigerator quickly enough, we cause the problem. If we don't wash our hands before we make dinner, we cause the problem. If we don't use a food thermometer to be sure the burgers were done enough to be safe, we cause the problem. And most of us don't go to the doctor for "a touch of stomach flu."

So, what should we do? There are just 4 basic rules of safe food handling that everyone should know. As soon as children start handling their own food, they need to be taught. As often as we prepare a meal, grab some take-out, or bring home a doggie bag from the restaurant, we need to think about, and follow these rules.

Rule 1: Keep foods clean. This includes washing all our fruits and vegetables before we cut, peel, chop or eat them. We don't need any special 'vegetable washes'. Just plain running water will do. Dry them with a paper towel, then enjoy them!

Rule 2: Keep cold foods cold. Check the temperature of your refrigerator. If it's warmer than

39° F, turn the thermostat down! Come straight home from the grocery store with cold foods. If it will be more than an hour until you get home, take a cooler of ice to chill your foods. And be sure to keep ALL cut fruits and vegetables cold, on ice or in the refrigerator. Defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator, not on the counter.

Rule 3: Keep hot foods hot. That starts with cooking them to the right temperature to kill bacteria. Poultry, leftovers and foods in the microwave need 165°F to be safe. Ground meats have to get to 155° F. Beef and pork in pieces must reach 145° F in the center. You can't trust your eyes, use a thermometer! Once it's cooked, keep it hot until it's eaten. Don't leave dinner sitting on the stove, or doggie bags in the car. When the temperature's over 90° F you only have 1 hour to be safe!

Rule 4: Keep foods separate. Yes, it's different cutting boards. But it also means separate plates to take food to and bring food from the grill. It includes putting things in the refrigerator so that juicy meat doesn't drip on cold salad, and using separate bags for meats or poultry in the grocery store and on the way home.

For more information on all these topics and plenty more, visit our website [http://hillsborough.ifas.ufl.edu/nutrition/food\\_safety.shtml](http://hillsborough.ifas.ufl.edu/nutrition/food_safety.shtml) . We just put up a whole new section on Safe Foods FAQs, with videos and lots of resource materials you can read or print out. The videos are really short, just 1 or 2 minutes, to give you quick answers to your questions. There will be more coming all through the month of September, so if your question isn't there now, it may be. Or contact me for other questions.

Here's an easy recipe for these hot days. If you want, peel 2-4 hard cooked eggs and add them to the jar or bowl. The longer they're in the juice the more pink they'll get. But eat them within 2 or 3 days. If they stay in the vinegar too long they'll get rubbery.

#### Spiced Pickled Beets

I can whole baby beets or sliced beets	1/4 cup cider (apple) vinegar
1/4 cup water	2 Tbsp sugar
1/4 tsp ground cloves	1/4 tsp ground allspice
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon	

Drain beets and cut into bite-sized pieces. Put in glass jar or a bowl. Put the other ingredients in a small saucepan and heat to boiling. Pour over the beets. Put the lid on the jar, or cover the bowl. Put in refrigerator until the next day. Turn the jar over or stir the bowl several times during the refrigeration to let all the beets soak in the brine.

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