

To Your Health

October 2009

Avoid Getting the Flu

It's everywhere; it's everywhere! -- information about the flu that is. For the most up-to-date information and recommendation, go to

www.flu.gov

This website is managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is packed with information about seasonal flu, H1N1 flu, vaccinations, etc.

A common question these days is:

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

According to www.flu.gov, "Washing your hands often will protect you from germs. We recommend that when you wash your hands - with soap and warm water - that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find

them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands."

Influenza viruses spread from person to person usually through the coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Besides hand washing,

...Cough or sneeze into your sleeve.

...Throw away tissues after using them.

...Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

...Avoid close contact with other people.

...Clean commonly used surfaces often (such as desks, handrails, doorknobs, etc.).

Fall - A Popular Time for Community Meals

By following some simple steps, volunteer cooks can make a community meal a safe fund raising success.

Plan ahead. Make sure the location meets your needs. Be sure you have enough oven, stovetop, refrigerator, freezer, and work space. Find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning.

Store and prepare food safely. Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping or preparing. Find separate preparation areas for raw and cooked food. Wash hands, cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and work surfaces frequently with hot, soapy water.

Cook food to safe internal temperatures. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, casseroles, and other food. Check temperature in several places to be sure food is safely cooked. It's the only way to tell if harmful bacteria are destroyed.

Transport food safely. Keep hot food at or above 140 degrees F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container. Keep cold food at or below 40 degrees F. Place in a cooler with a cold source such as ice or commercial freezing gels.

Need to reheat? Food must be hot and steamy for serving. Just "warmed up" is not good enough. Use the stove, oven or microwave to reheat food to 165 degrees F. Bring soups, sauces and gravies to a boil.

Keep food out of the "Danger Zone" (40-140 degrees F). Place cooked food in chafing dishes, pre-heated steam tables, warming trays, and/or slow cookers. Keep hot food hot - at or above 140 degrees F. Place cold food in containers on ice. Keep the food's temperature at or below 40 degrees F.

When in doubt, throw it out! Discard food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Place leftovers in shallow containers. Refrigerate or freeze immediately.

For more food safety information, go to:

www.fsis.usda.gov

www.foodsafety.gov

1-800-262-3804 ISU Extension AnswerLine

1-800-535-4555 USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

Home Food Safety Mythbuster

Myth: You should not put hot food in the refrigerator.

Fact: Hot food can be placed directly in the refrigerator. A large pot of soup or stew should be divided into small portions and put in shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator. If you leave food out to cool and

forget about it - then toss it! Food is not safe to eat after sitting out at room temperature for more than two hours.

Vegetables - Spend Smart

Compare fresh, frozen, canned.

Fresh

..Buy fresh vegetables in season. They cost less and are likely to be at their peak flavor.

Frozen

..Commercially frozen products are frozen within hours of picking and tend to retain more flavor. They also have less sodium than canned.

..Buy plain frozen vegetables instead of those with special sauces or seasonings - which add calories, fat, sodium - and cost!

Canned

..Consider store brands; they are usually lower priced and often packed by the same manufacturers as name brands.

..Choose the product most appropriate for intended use. For example, buy the least expensive chopped tomato for soup or stew.

..Drain and rinse canned vegetables to reduce the sodium.

Protect your investment.

Store in the refrigerator in a plastic bag:

..About 1 week - beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, peppers.

..Use within 3 to 5 days - asparagus, green beans, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, summer squash, sweet corn.

Store in a cool, dry place:

..Onions, potatoes, pumpkin, winter squash

..Tomatoes keep their flavor longer when stored stem-side down at room temperature.