

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment. This is Katie Johnson, and joining me as my guest this morning is Julie Hamre. She is the lead clinical dietician at Lake Region Healthcare's nutrition services. She's a registered dietician and a certified diabetes educator, and she's here to talk with us about summer food safety. Good morning Julie.

Julie Hamre: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: Well, this is the time of the year that we have all kinds of fun outdoor celebrations, and usually they include food. I'd like to start by talking about why summer food safety is such an important issue.

Julie Hamre: Maintaining food safety during the summertime can be a challenge. Due to warmer temperatures, bacteria can cause food poisoning to grow more rapidly than in the cooler months. Also, along with family outings, vacations, and eating on the run, people prepare more food and eat more food outdoors, all of which provide their own hazards. Although safe food handling rules should always apply, extra precautions are necessary during the summer to prevent foodborne illness.

Katie Johnson: You mentioned food poisoning. What exactly is food poisoning?

Julie Hamre: Food poisoning is caused by foodborne pathogens. What is a pathogen? A pathogen is the oldest and broadest sense in anything that can produce disease. When you think of the term foodborne illness, it is a disease borne in food.

Katie Johnson: Are some people more susceptible to food poisoning than others, or is it just whether or not you become exposed to that pathogen?

Julie Hamre: Yes, some people are more susceptible, even though everyone has a risk of contracting food poisoning. Some people that have a greater risk of developing serious illness, those high risk groups include older adults, infants, young children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems and chronic illness, such as diabetes, kidney disease, HIV/AIDS, and some cancer patients.

Katie Johnson: Sure, so anyone that's maybe more susceptible to illness in general is also going to be more susceptible to food poisoning. What are some of the most common mistakes that people make when it comes to summer food safety?

Julie Hamre: Well, it all goes back to hand washing with me. Proper hand washing can eliminate nearly half of all cases of food poisoning, and significantly reduce the spread of the common cold and flu.

Katie Johnson: That's an incredible statistic, really.

Julie Hamre: Yep, it is, it is. A lot of times when you're at a picnic, there is no place to wash your hands.

Katie Johnson: Right. Other common mistakes, or ones that especially just make you cringe?

Julie Hamre: Yes. The temperature danger zone, which is huge in nutrition, especially here in the hospital. The temperature danger zone is a temperature between 40 and 140. Cold foods need to be kept below 40, and hot foods need to be held above 140. Food can only be in the temperature danger zone for two hours. If you're outside at a picnic and it's over 90 degrees, food should only be out of that range for one hour.

Katie Johnson: Less than 40, or greater than 140, to be safe.

Julie Hamre: Exactly.

Katie Johnson: Two hours typically within that range, or one hour if it's outside and warm.

Julie Hamre: Yep.

Katie Johnson: Those are good tips, that's easy to remember. Let's talk about some different scenarios. Maybe we're having a backyard barbecue with guests coming, and it's going to be a hot day, like you said. You certainly don't want anyone to get sick from the food you're serving. What would you do to think safely about planning this kind of an event?

Julie Hamre: Well, there really are no limits, as long as you follow proper food handling procedures, just going back to the keeping cold foods cold and the hot foods hot. A study analyzing outbreaks of foodborne illness found contaminated salad greens made the most people sick, so wash produce before eating it. Another thing, you have to wash your hands. Keep separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from ready-to-eat food. Make sure you're cooking to proper temperatures if you're grilling, and keeping the cold perishable foods in a cooler.

Katie Johnson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). If you were a guest at a picnic, and it's potluck, what are some ideas of things that you might bring that you know are tasty, but you know will be safe to bring to a picnic too?

Julie Hamre: I guess my thought is fresh fruits and vegetables are always safe. Something like a fruit kebab. Acidic salads versus salads made with mayonnaise, so like a coleslaw made with vinegar instead of a coleslaw made with mayo, something like that. Homemade cookies, things like that hold well.

Katie Johnson: When you're at that picnic and you know that your food is safe, but you don't know about what everyone else brought, do you have any tips for going through the line, and maybe things you want to avoid, or things you do want to serve up extra?

Julie Hamre: There are a number of things I would look for. Number one is, is the picnic table sitting in the sun, and how long has the food been sitting out? We can usually keep an eye on that kind of thing. It's very difficult to tell from the look, smell, and taste of the food whether it's bad or not. Look for flies. Watch where people are bringing

the food from. Were food items brought in a cooler, or just brought out of the car? If the cold food isn't cold, don't eat it. If you touch it and it's warm, don't eat it. Also, if meat is being grilled, check to see if it is cooked all the way through. Hamburger can be brown and still not be at the right temperature. Chicken juices should be clear.

Katie Johnson: Sure. Another common summer festivity are the festivals, and events throughout the summer. How about food poisoning at these events? Is that something to be on the watch for as well?

Julie Hamre: I think so. One thing that popped into my mind, that I heard of, was ice. Ice can be contaminated. Snow cones, that was one thing I heard recently that was contaminated. I mean, I've eaten hundreds of snow cones in my life and never gotten sick, but it is, ice has to be handled correctly also. I would be careful with any ready-to-eat cold items, like salads or sandwiches. Soft serve ice cream machines, if they're not cleaned daily, they can contain lots of bacteria and make you sick. The ice cream that you see scooped out of the bucket is probably safer than ice cream coming from an ice cream machine.

Katie Johnson: Sure.

Julie Hamre: If you buy something deep fried and it tastes a little bit off, or really oily, they may be using old oil, or not getting the oil up to temperature. I know I ate a sandwich once that, I knew something was wrong with it, and I ate it anyway, and oh man, was I sick.

Katie Johnson: Oh! Yeah. Sometimes you need to just trust your instincts, don't you?

Julie Hamre: Yes, trust your instincts.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. Camping's another favorite summer activity. Any tips for campers on the storage and preparation of their food?

Julie Hamre: If you're storing food in coolers, you have to keep the food ready to eat separate, in a different cooler from food that is raw. If the ice melts, throw the food away. Keep the ice full in the cooler. After you take out perishable foods, put them right back in the cooler, don't leave them sitting out. Another thing to really think of when you go camping is make sure you have a source of safe drinking water, and then washing your hands. You have to wash your hands when you're handling food.

Katie Johnson: If you don't have access to running water easily for washing your hands, is hand sanitizer an acceptable substitute?

Julie Hamre: Well, it's better than nothing. There's nothing as good as hand washing, but it would help.

Katie Johnson: It would be better than nothing.

Julie Hamre: Yes.

Katie Johnson: You've given us lots of great tips, Julie. Anything else that you want to add, or that we missed in our topics of discussion about summer food safety?

Julie Hamre: We didn't talk about cross contamination at all. Cross contamination is what occurs when juices from raw meats, or germs from unclean objects touch ready-to-eat foods. If you're grilling, this is the one thing that really makes me cringe, is if I see someone putting raw food on a plate, and then grilling it, and then putting it back on the same plate again. You cannot use the same plate for raw food and foods that are already cooked.

Katie Johnson: Have a clean plate to put your cooked meat on once you take it off the grill.

Julie Hamre: Exactly.

Katie Johnson: Very good advice. Julie Hamre, thank you so much for sharing your summer food safety tips. Hopefully we'll help avoid some food poisoning at summer picnics this year with the tips you've provided for us.

Julie Hamre: Thank you, I hope it helped.

Katie Johnson: Julie Hamre, lead clinical dietician, registered dietician, and a certified diabetes educator in the Lake Region Healthcare nutrition services department, my guest today on Apple a Day, talking food safety. Julie and I both reminding you that there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.