

Ask an Expert – Nine Tips for Safe Summer Picnics

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Summertime is here, and after a long spring, many people are eager to get outside and socialize. Although there is no current evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 through food or food packaging, there are definite precautions to take when planning potlucks and picnics this summer. As we know, the chance of exposure to the disease increases when we gather, and can come from coughing, sneezing and even just talking. While large groups are still not recommended, here are nine best practices to keep in mind if you choose to gather with family and friends:

1. **Gather in small groups and avoid close contact.** Gather outside to help guests spread out and stay distanced, and place lawn chairs at least 6 feet apart. If you are unable to social distance, wear a face mask.
1. **Provide hand sanitizer.** Guests can use it when they arrive and before they eat or touch food.
1. **Limit hand-to-food contact.** If possible, offer individually packaged foods. For example, instead of providing a large bag of chips for everyone, purchase small, individual-sized bags.
1. **Avoid sharing items with others.** If you are serving the food buffet style, have one person serve so it eliminates multiple people from touching serving utensils. Also, don't share food with people outside your immediate family.

1. **Keep the food and serving areas out of the reach of children.** Germs can spread easily if many hands touch the same things. Have adults prepare plates for children.
1. **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often.** We know that a person can contract the virus by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touching his or her mouth, nose or eyes.
1. **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Use a tissue if possible, and dispose of it. Be sure to wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.
1. **Be aware of how you feel.** If you are feeling any symptoms, avoid gathering with others and stay home. If you are considered high-risk, it is still recommended to stay home and limit visiting friends and family without an urgent need.
1. **Continue to follow general food safety practices.** Remember to properly clean, separate, cook and chill your foods to avoid food-borne illnesses. **Clean** your hands and the preparation and cooking surfaces frequently. Wash cutting boards and all utensils in hot, soapy water or in the dishwasher after each use. Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing. **Separate** raw meat from fresh foods while cutting, cleaning and storing. Do not place cooked meats on a dirty plate that once held raw meat. **Cook** food to appropriate internal temperatures to destroy harmful microorganisms. **Chill** foods and avoid leaving them out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Use coolers and ice to keep cold foods cold and heating sources to keep hot foods hot.

Sources: CDC.gov, Foodsafety.gov, FDA.gov, Fightbac.org

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