
Press Release

NEWS

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS
“NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH”

Residents Encouraged To Explore Food Safety “Mythbusters”

September is National Food Safety Education Month and Burlington County Health Department is joining with the non-profit Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE) to introduce “Food Safety Mythbusters” to consumers.

“Food safety is a high priority for the Burlington County Health Department,” says Robert Gogats, Health Officer for Burlington County. “By participating with the Partnership on Mythbusters, we help remind people during Food Safety Education Month how to make food safety a priority at home.”

Storing leftovers is the basis for one of this year’s four featured myths. The myths are presented with the facts consumers need to know to help reduce their risk of foodborne illness:

Myth: Leftovers are safe to eat until they smell bad.

Fact: Most people would not choose to eat spoiled, smelly food. However, if they did, they would not necessarily get sick. This is because there are different types of bacteria, some of which cause illness in people and others that don’t. The types of bacteria that do cause illness do not affect the taste, smell, or appearance of food. For this reason it is important to freeze or toss refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days. If you are unsure of how long your leftovers have been sitting in the refrigerator, don’t take the risk - when in doubt, throw it out!

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Myth: I use bleach and water to sanitize my countertops and the more bleach I use the more bacteria I kill.

Fact: There is no advantage to using more bleach. In fact, overuse of bleach can be harmful because it is not safe to consume. To create a sanitizing solution it is recommended that you use 1 tablespoon of unscented liquid bleach per gallon of water. Flood the countertop with the solution, allow it to sit for a few minutes, then pat with clean, dry paper towels or allow to air dry. Any leftover sanitizing solution can be stored, tightly covered, for up to one week. After that, the bleach has lost its effectiveness.

Myth: I don't need to wash my produce if I am going to peel it.

Fact: You should wash fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water just before eating, cutting or cooking. Harmful bacteria could be on the outside of the produce. If you peel or cut it without first washing it the bacteria could be transferred to the part you eat. Wash delicate produce such as grapes or lettuce under cool running water. Blot dry with a clean cloth towel or paper towel. Rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running tap water or scrub with a clean produce brush. Never use detergent or bleach to wash fresh fruits or vegetables. These products are not intended for consumption.

Myth: The stand time recommended for microwaveable foods is optional, it's just so you don't burn yourself.

Fact: Stand time is not about cooling the microwaved food, but rather is an important part of the cooking process. Stand times are usually just a few minutes and the time is necessary to bring the food to a safe internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer. To ensure safety with microwave cooking, always read and follow package instructions, know your microwave's wattage, and use a food thermometer to ensure food has reached a safe internal temperature.

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Mythbusters educational materials including a PowerPoint presentation, Educator's kit, and other consumer-friendly tools are available for free download at www.fightbac.org.

Each year, the Health Department inspects over 2,000 food establishments in Burlington County ranging from fast food restaurants to schools and institutional facilities, from fine dining establishments to convenience stores. These inspections help ensure public health and prevent the spread of food borne illness.

During inspections, inspectors concentrate on risk factors affecting food borne illness and teach food handlers how to use sound practices and proper sanitary procedures when working with food.

“While the health department does inspect the retail food establishments, it is up to the individual person to ensure they are using proper food safety techniques when preparing food at home,” said Robert Gogats, Health Officer for Burlington County.

For more information about the Health Department's retail food program please contact them at 609-265-5515.

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