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### **Make Sure Your Cook-Outs are Safe and Healthy**

Americans love cook-outs, and summer is the optimal time for families and friends to enjoy the outdoors while cooking and sharing a meal. In fact, since gas grills have become so popular, over ½ of Americans report they cook-out year round, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As with all things, however, cooking outdoors can pose hazards to health and safety if people are careless. Issues related to fire prevention, food safety, and healthy eating should be kept in mind in order to assure a safe and enjoyable experience for all concerned.

Before grilling food, be sure to follow safety measures to avoid accidents. According to the National Safety Council, over 76% of American households own a grill. Of those households, the National Fire Protection Association reports improper use of grills has resulted in over 6,100 accidental fires and explosions causing 20,000 emergency room visits and \$29.1 million in damage. Every year, more than 500 fires occur when people are grilling, and about 20 people are injured annually from grill fires and explosions. Further, approximately 20 people die each year and another 400 are treated in the emergency room as the result of carbon monoxide poisoning related to the use of charcoal grills. To reduce the risks associated with grilling, the following tips are offered by the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Never burn charcoal inside homes, tents, campers or vehicles, and keep grills with freshly burned charcoal outside for at least 48 hours before disposing of ashes in a non-combustible container.
- Never use gasoline or kerosene to start a charcoal fire, as they may explode.
- Keep a spray bottle of water nearby to control flare-ups.
- Grill a safe distance from all structures, including houses, breezeways, garages, and porches. Be mindful of overhead obstructions, such as tree branches.
- Check tubes and hoses on gas grills, and maintain them in good condition. Move hoses away from hot surfaces and dripping grease.
- Always store and transport propane tanks in an upright position.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill.

With regard to food safety, be certain to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. When defrosting meat, defrost in a microwave oven and cook immediately, or allow the meat to defrost slowly in the refrigerator until it is ready to be cooked. Similarly, marinate foods in the refrigerator, not on the counter where the warm temperature will allow bacteria to thrive. If the marinade is going to be re-used to make a sauce after raw meat has been in it, boil the marinade for at least 3 minutes first. Avoid cross contamination of foods by using separate plates and utensils for foods both before and after cooking. When pre-cooking or partially cooking meats in the oven or microwave, be certain to put the partially cooked meat on the grill immediately, and cook all food thoroughly (to a safe minimum internal temperature, generally around 165<sup>0</sup> F.)

In addition to preventing food-borne illness using safe food handling and preparation techniques, another concern has arisen regarding whether or not grilling foods increases the risk of developing some forms of cancer. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), grilling red meat, poultry, and fish has been linked to the development of tumors in animals, and may increase the risk of breast, colon, stomach, and prostate

cancer in humans. However, both the AICR and the USDA agree measures can be taken to reduce the risk of developing cancer by employing a few simple modifications to grilling. These include

- Marinating meats before grilling to reduce the production of certain cancer-causing compounds.
- Trim fat off meat, choosing lean cuts whenever possible. Remove the skin from poultry before grilling, and avoid high-fat meats such as ribs or sausages.
- Pre-cook meats, fish and poultry and immediately finish on the grill for flavor.
- Use small portion sizes, such as kabobs, to reduce the amount of time on the grill.
- Avoid letting juices drip into the flames or coals to reduce the likelihood of flare-ups and smoke. Use spatulas and tongs instead of piercing meats with a fork to turn, and flip the meat often.
- Remove charred or burnt portions of food before eating.
- Grill other types of food, such as vegetables, fruit, and even pizza.

The USDA points out that the current research indicates “eating moderate amounts of grilled meats like fish, meat, and poultry cooked – without charring—to a safe temperature does not pose a problem” with regard to cancer. However, if frequent grilling throughout the week is the habit, it would be wise to employ the above modifications to your grilling routine.

For further information about grilling foods safely, contact the USDA at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) (1-888-674-6854), the CPSC at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) (1-800-638-2772), the National Safety Council at [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org) (1-630-285-1121), or the AICR at [www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org) (1-800-843-8114). “The Facts About Grilling” brochures, prepared by the American Institute for Cancer Research, are available at the main office of the Central Connecticut Health District, 505 Silas Deane Hwy., Wethersfield. Additional information about this or other public health concerns is available at the Health District office or web site ([www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org)), or by calling 860-721-2822.