
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department Observes National Food Safety Education Month

Promoting Safe Food Handling During Labor Day Weekend and Beyond

September is National Food Safety Education Month, a time dedicated to helping people prevent foodborne illness through safe food handling, preparation, and storage. The CDC estimates that 1 in 6 Americans, about 48 million people get sick from foodborne illnesses each year. Locally, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDHD) received eight reports of foodborne illness in 2024, along with eleven general food complaints and five foodborne-related complaints. These numbers highlight the importance of food safety right here at home.

As families and friends gather for the Labor Day weekend, often with barbecues, picnics, and potlucks, food safety is especially important. The USDA's "[Top Ten Labor Day Weekend Food Safety Tips](#)" stress the importance of packing perishable foods cold, keeping them at or below 40 °F, separating raw meats from ready-to-eat foods, cooking foods to safe internal temperatures, and following the "2-hour rule" of discarding perishable food left out over 2 hours (or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F).

BLDHD encourages everyone to follow the FDA's four core food safety steps:

1. **Clean:** Wash hands before and after handling food, and sanitize utensils, cutting boards, and surfaces.
2. **Separate:** Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination.
3. **Cook:** Use a food thermometer to reach safe internal temperatures (145 °F for beef or fish, 160 °F for ground meats, and 165 °F for poultry).
4. **Chill:** Refrigerate perishables within 2 hours (or 1 hour above 90 °F) and store leftovers in shallow containers at 40 °F or below.

BLDHD's tips for safe holiday gatherings:

- Use separate coolers for drinks and perishable food.
- Keep coolers in the shade and closed as much as possible.
- Wash produce before serving, even if you plan to peel it.
- Clean grills before use to remove residue and bacteria.
- Discard leftovers after 3–4 days.

"Foodborne illness can be serious, but the good news is that it's largely preventable," says Dan Thorell, Health Officer at BLDHD. "By following basic food safety practices, you can help protect your family and friends—especially during busy holiday weekends like Labor Day."

For more information on food safety, visit bldhd.org. If you have concerns or suspect a foodborne illness, contact the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department at 231-256-0200.

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