

Take your burger's temperature

By Debbie Botzek-Linn, University of Minnesota Extension

ST. CLOUD, Minn. (6/16/2014) —Are you using a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of your burgers? It's important to always use a thermometer to be sure hamburgers are cooked to 160°F for 15 seconds for best results in killing bacteria.

E. coli 0157:H7 is the pathogen of concern. A number of foodborne illness outbreaks have been linked to undercooked ground beef. This pathogen can survive both refrigerator and freezer storage, making proper thawing and cooking crucial.

Many food handlers and consumers believe that visible signs—such as color changes in the food, or the juices running clear—are indicators that the food is safe. However, a brown burger does not always ensure a safe hamburger. A study done by Kansas State University found that a sufficient number of ground beef patties were turning brown well before they reached 160°F, the temperature needed to thoroughly kill E. coli 0157:H7. In fact, some ground beef patties can look well-done at an internal temperature as low as 131°F.

Flipping the burgers several times when grilling or frying has been found to help the burgers reach a more even internal temperature, according to a study conducted at Washington State University. The frequent flipping helped eliminate cold spots inside the hamburger, which can harbor bacteria.

When checking the internal temperature of a hamburger patty, insert a meat thermometer in the side of the patty, rather than the top, for a more accurate reading. Food thermometers are economical and readily available in the kitchen department of retail and grocery stores. They typically cost \$5 to \$10 each.

Using a thermometer to ensure proper cooking temperature is especially important for those serving ground beef to people most at risk for foodborne illness: young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems.

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