

Summer's Pesky Pathogens

Problem: Dispensers

Pathogen: *Listeria spp.*

This risk affects wet, cool devices like ice cream dispensers. If the tubes and trays that carry and catch moisture are not properly cleaned, bacterial contamination can build up and lead to outbreaks. At particular risk are pregnant women; an infection can lead to miscarriage.

What can you do?

Ask the attendant when the machines were last cleaned - it should be no more than 24 hours ago.

Air conditioning units can also harbor bacteria, mold, and fungi. Be sure to clean filters more often during summer months or periods of increased use. Wear gloves and a mask when switching out filters.

Problem: Pool Water

Pathogen: *E. coli*

Properly chlorinated pools should protect you from most bacteria. However, public pools are not always sufficiently chlorinated, or they are so dirty that there is not enough chlorine to do the job.

What can you do?

You can actually test chlorine levels in any pool yourself using pool test strips available in most big box stores. A good rule for everyone is to avoid swallowing pool water at all costs and to keep anyone with diarrhea out of the pool.

Problem: Undercooked Meat

Pathogen: *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*

If frozen burgers are not thawed before grilling, they may not cook fully. Undercooked meat could contain *E. coli* or other pathogens.

What can you do?

Make sure any meat you cook is heated to the proper temperature by using a cooking thermometer.

Problem: Ticks

Pathogen: *Borrelia burgdorferi* (Lyme disease)

Ticks carrying disease present a risk to anyone spending time outdoors. With prompt care, the infection can be eradicated with antibiotics, but left untreated, can develop into a life-long condition.

What can you do?

Always wear insect repellent, long sleeves and long pants when spending time in wooded areas, and check your body for ticks afterwards. See a doctor immediately if you find a tick or possible evidence of a tick bite.

Worried about mosquitoes?

There are many viruses that are spread through mosquitoes, so it's always a good idea to wear repellent. Eliminate standing water around your home - no need to provide place for eggs!

Problem: Sunburn

Pathogen: Various

It's not the sun itself that puts you at risk for an infection, it's the damage to the skin as a result of severe sunburn. Just like a burn from a fire, sunburn can destroy the outer layers of skin, which are then vulnerable to infection.

What can you do?

Apply and reapply sunscreen every single day, even cloudy days!

Problem: Coastal Contamination

Pathogen: *Vibrio*, *E. coli*

Ocean, sea, lake and river water can present risks to swimmers. The risk is increased for swimmers with an open cut or for those who consume contaminated seafood.

What can you do?

Check online for the water quality of the body of water you plan to swim in - if there is frequent enough contamination, the city website should have daily reports. Don't swim if you have an open cut, or cover it with a waterproof bandage. See a doctor if you develop a rash after swimming. For those preparing or eating seafood, always wash your hands after touching raw seafood or shellfish.

Problem: Picnic Foods

Pathogen: Various

The threat from picnic foods such as potato salad is not actually from the mayonnaise! Potatoes, past, and eggs are what introduce the bacteria to the mix. If kept refrigerated or stored in a cooler or surrounded by ice, the bacteria won't have a chance to reproduce to dangerous levels.

What can you do?

Keep all food refrigerated until served. Serve in a double bowl configuration, with one large bowl filled with ice and a second bowl on top, holding the food. Another option is to place serving bowls in a large cooler filled with ice.