

# Handling food safely on the road



**gwinnett**county  
**Cooperative Extension  
Education Resource**

*From the USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service*

**Vacation!** Oh, how we long for that eight letter word every summer, when millions of us eagerly get away from school and work. We take to the road in cars or recreational vehicles, live on boats, relax in beach or mountain vacation homes, and camp.

No matter where we go or what we do, there is a common denominator that runs through all of our summer travels and relaxation – it's called food! There are some simple, common-sense food safety rules that can save a vacation from disaster. Following this advice could make the difference between a vacation to remember and one that is remembered because people got sick from improperly handled food.



**First, some general rules while traveling this summer:**

**Plan ahead:** If you are traveling with perishable food, place it in a cooler with ice or freezer packs. When carrying drinks, consider packing them in a separate cooler so the food cooler is not opened frequently. Have plenty of ice or frozen gel-packs on hand before starting to pack food. If you take perishable foods along to eat on the road or to cook at your vacation spot, plan to keep everything on ice in your cooler.

**Pack safely:** Pack perishable foods directly from the refrigerator or freezer into the cooler. Meat and poultry may be packed while it is still frozen, in that way it stays colder longer. Also, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled. Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits.

If the cooler is only partially filled, pack the remaining space with more ice. For long trips to the shore or the mountains, take along two coolers – one for the day's immediate food needs, such as lunch, drinks, or snacks, and the other for perishable foods to be used later in the vacation. Limit the times the cooler is opened and open and close the lid quickly.

**When camping:**

- Keep the cooler in a shady spot covered with a blanket, tarp, or poncho, preferably one that is light in color to reflect heat
- Bring bottled water or canned drinks
- Keep hands and utensils clean when preparing food

**When boating:**

- Make sure to take the cooler along
- Don't let perishable food sit out while swimming or fishing. Remember, food sitting out for more than two hours is not safe
- If you catch fin fish, scale, gut, and clean the fish as soon as they are caught. Wrap both whole and cleaned fish in water-tight plastic and store on ice
- Crabs, lobsters, and other shellfish must be kept alive until cooked

**When at the beach:**

- Take along only the amount of food that can be eaten to avoid having leftovers
- Bring the cooler! Partially bury it in the sand, cover with blankets, and shade with a beach umbrella
- If dining along the boardwalk, make sure the food stands frequented look clean, and that hot foods are served hot and cold foods cold

**When in the vacation home or the recreation vehicle:**

- If a vacation home or a recreational vehicle has not been used for a while, check leftover canned food from the previous year. Discard canned foods which may have been exposed to freezing and thawing temperatures over the winter
- Check the refrigerator. If unplugged from last year, thoroughly clean it before using
- Make sure the refrigerator, food preparation areas, and utensils in the vacation home or in the recreational vehicle are thoroughly cleaned with hot soapy water