

HEALTH ALERT!

Picnic Foods May Carry Incurable Bacteria

by Dr. Tamar Barlam

(NAPSA)—That burger or piece of chicken you put on the grill may pack more than just good ol' barbecue flavor. Across America, doctors have reported rising numbers of people infected with bacteria resistant to treatment with antibiotics. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria often lurk on food and might cause food poisoning, especially if you don't take precautions in cleaning and preparing raw meat, eggs, and fish. The bacteria that cause these illnesses are getting more and more resistant to antibiotics, largely because healthy chickens, hogs and cattle are fed antibiotics for much of their lives. Recently, the American Medical Association recognized that antibiotic resistance is a growing public health problem and called for an end to the unnecessary use of antibiotics to speed the growth of healthy farm animals.

More than 70 percent of all antibiotics used in the United States today are used not to treat human diseases, nor to treat sick animals, but to artificially boost weight gain in healthy livestock (and fish). Low doses of antibiotics help farm animals grow faster and cope with the stresses of being raised in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions on factory farms. When animals are given low doses of antibiotics only some of the bacteria are killed. The rest of the bacteria survive and are stronger and more resistant, and live to multiply and pass on their strength and resistance to future generations.

The AMA action underscores the health threat posed by antibiotic resistance, but until meat producers act on the AMA's advice,



Families can avoid a number of food borne illnesses by safely handling the food they eat.

consumers have to take charge of their health. Here are some tips on how to keep your family safe:

- Be careful when cooking to wash your hands, utensils, counters, and other surfaces after contact with raw meat or poultry to prevent food-borne illness.
- Separate raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food to prevent cross-contamination.
- Cook meats to safe internal temperatures. Use a meat thermometer to be sure.
- Store leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer within 2 hours of taking food off the grill.
- Consumers should buy meat produced without antibiotics, when available. For more information, go to www.iatp.org for a list of grocery stores that carry antibiotic-free meat.
- If your supermarket doesn't carry antibiotic-free meat and poultry products, ask for them.

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