Dietary Guidelines for Americans Highlight the Importance of Food Safety

Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk products, lean meats, and physical activity. These are all key recommendations for good health included in the revised Dietary Guidelines for Americans released early last year. But, what about the importance of food safety?

Avoiding foods that are contaminated with harmful bacteria is vital to healthy eating says County Extension Agent, [insert name here].

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that there are 76 million cases of foodborne illness resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths each year. Symptoms of foodborne illness include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal cramps. The revised Dietary Guidelines for Americans also stresses the importance of food safety in the home to prevent foodborne illness.

The Partnership for Food Safety Education at www.fightbac.org recommends the following steps to help consumers keep food safe:

**COOK:** To kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness, cook foods to the proper temperature. Always use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the food prior to eating it.

**CLEAN:** To fight bacteria, thoroughly clean kitchen appliances, utensils and countertops used to prepare food. Most importantly, always wash your hands with warm water and soap before preparing and/or eating food.

**CHILL:** To keep harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying, refrigerate foods quickly, and keep the refrigerator set at 40°F and the freezer unit at 0°F. Check these temperatures with an appliance thermometer.

**SEPARATE:** Cross-contamination is how bacteria spread from one food to another and from unclean hands and surfaces to food. Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods. And, again, keep hands, surfaces and utensils clean.

The revised dietary guidelines suggest an increased intake of fruits and vegetables can provide important health benefits. There are also six special recommendations for safe handling of fresh fruits and vegetables including: check, clean, separate, cook, chill, and throw away. For complete information about how to keep foods safe in your home, contact your local County Extension Agent at [insert contact information here].