



Camping is a popular recreational pastime in West Virginia. But to have a really good time, you need to stay healthy. This information sheet will help you talk to your child about food safety at the campsite.

Acute gastroenteritis ('stomach bug') is the most common infectious disease encountered when camping. Symptoms of acute gastroenteritis include sudden onset of severe vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal cramps. The majority of these cases are transmitted from an ill person or through contaminated foods and water. Acute gastroenteritis is usually caused by a virus called norovirus. Other causes of foodborne illness include bacteria, such as *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *Campylobacter* and *E coli*; or parasites such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*.

7 Top Food Safety Tips

Following some basic food safety guidelines can help prevent foodborne illnesses. We have provided some basic tips for parents on food safety so you can talk to your child before they go to camp:

1. **Teach your child to wash their hands after using the bathroom, before eating, before preparing food, and after handling foods like meat, poultry and eggs.** Hand washing after using the bathroom prevents the spread of illness from one person to another. Hand washing before preparing or eating food prevents the food from getting contaminated before it goes in somebody's mouth. Raw meat, poultry and eggs are sometimes contaminated with unsafe bacteria like *Salmonella* or *E coli*. Always wash your hands after touching raw meat, poultry or eggs. Washing with clean water and soap prevents the spread of disease. If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer should be used.
2. **Tell your child not to drink water from rivers, lakes, creeks or streams.** Surface water can easily get contaminated by human or animal waste. During wilderness camping if they can't bring water with them, an adult or counselor should help them treat the water to make it safe to drink.
3. **Remind your camper not to share cups or utensils with others.** Drinking and eating after another person could cause your child to get sick. Colds, flu and other viral illnesses may spread through saliva. Some forms of meningitis can also spread this way.
4. **Check with the camp before sending food, even snack food to camp.** Most rural areas of West Virginia have a lot of wildlife, and children should never store food, even snack food in a

tent. If you send food to camp, make sure there is a safe place to store it and send it in airtight and bug-tight containers.

5. **Instruct your child to clean their dishes and utensils properly with detergent and clean water.** Do not use water from rivers, creeks or streams for cleaning as it may be contaminated.
6. **Tell your camper to wash raw vegetables and fruits in clean, treated water before eating.**
7. **Camp staff should supervise campers in preparation of food at the campsite.** Some easy rules to remember include:
 - Always use clean utensils and cutting boards for preparing food.
 - Clean utensils and cutting boards after they have been used for meat, poultry and fish. Do not put cooked meats or poultry back on the same plate used for raw meat or poultry.
 - Store food in airtight, waterproof, bug proof containers.
 - Keep cold food cold, and hot food hot. Take care with meat and poultry because it is difficult to keep chilled in a camp setting.
 - Fresh caught fish can be kept chilled or alive until ready to cook
 - Make sure food is cooked to the right internal temperature. The only way to do this is to use a food thermometer. Just because it “looks done” doesn’t mean it is safe!

Please use the links provided for additional information:

1. **Center for Disease Control:** <http://www.cdc.gov/family/camping/>
2. **United States Department of Agriculture:** http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/food-safety-while-hiking-camping-and-boating/ct_index
3. **Foodsafety.gov:** <http://www.foodsafety.gov/>
4. **National Institute of Health:** <http://health.nih.gov/topic/FoodborneDiseases>
5. **WVBPH-Food and Waterborne Diseases Page:** <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/disease/FnW/Pages/default.aspx>