

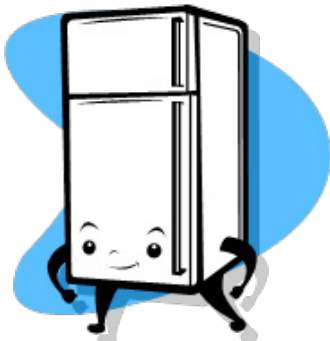
Back to School Food Safety Tips

The beginning of the school year is right around the corner. In the annual back to school frenzy parents' minds race with thoughts of buying school supplies, new school clothes, and carpools. Packing their child's lunch for the next day simply becomes part of the routine, and it's the last thing that any parent thinks could possibly harm their child. On the contrary, school age children and their vulnerable immune systems are at the greatest risk for becoming one of the 48 million Americans that contract a food related illness every year. Fear not, as there are several precautions parents can take to ensure that they are safely packing lunches for their children.

Temperature of Perishable Foods

When packing lunches that include perishable foods such as lunchmeat, tuna, egg salad, string cheese, and milk, it's critically important that parents make sure to keep the temperature of these foods at or below 41°F until lunchtime.

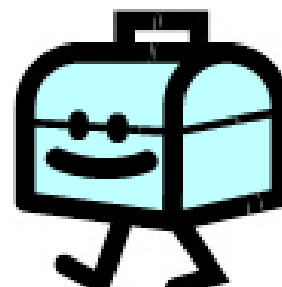
- After making lunch, keep it in the fridge until it's time to go to school.
- If your school has refrigerators available to store your child's lunch, use it. It is the best way to ensure proper temperature on those warm days. If your school does not have refrigerators suggest that they invest in them.
- Freeze juices boxes or water bottles to keep the rest of the food cold.
- Better yet, pack a frozen gel pack in the lunch to keep it cold.
- Don't save or reuse any leftovers from lunch, only pack enough food for that day.
- When possible, pack non-perishable foods like peanut butter and jelly, fresh fruit, fresh cut vegetables, and pretzels.



Keep it Clean

You want to make sure that everything that will come into contact with your child's lunch is clean.

- Make sure that you have thoroughly cleaned and sanitized your cutting boards and counters before you start preparing lunch for tomorrow.
- If you prepared any raw meats or poultry, use separate cutting boards and utensils to prepare lunch.
- Wash your child's lunch box or reusable lunch bag every day.





Health and Handwashing

The number one way food becomes contaminated is from someone contaminating their hands and then preparing food without washing their hands first.

- Always wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 15 to 20 seconds prior to preparing food.
- If your hands become contaminated while preparing food (i.e. sneezing, coughing, or touching any contaminated surface), stop and wash your hands before you resume.
- If you are sick with symptoms like diarrhea, vomiting, and fever, have someone else prepare lunch if at all possible as that illness may be transferred while preparing food.
- Encourage and remind your children to wash their hands before they eat lunch.



Safe Food

Every parent wants to make sure that they are serving their child safe food. Here are some things you can check for just to be sure:

- Wash all fruits and vegetables where the child will be eating the outside skin like apples, pears, and peaches.
- Check the dates of canned goods to make sure that they are not expired.
- Don't use canned food if the can is swollen at one or both ends, severely dented on the seam, or rusted and leaking.
- If your child has any of the common food allergies (milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy, or wheat) double check labels to make sure they don't show up in any of the ingredients
- It's going to be tough, but try to discourage the time honored tradition of trading food at lunch. You never know when food prepared by other parents may contain food your child is allergic to.



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