

Packing a Safe School Lunch

Make sure your child's lunch passes from your kitchen to the school lunch room in A+ condition:

Keep It Cool

- Perishable foods should not be out of refrigeration for more than two hours. Keep your child's lunch safe by packing it in an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack to keep foods cold. As an alternative, use a frozen water bottle. It works just as well and doubles as a refreshing noon-time drink.
- Consider replacing foods that can spoil with more shelf-stable options. Try trail mix, granola bars, bagels, carrot and celery sticks, whole fruit, single-serve applesauce, cans of tuna or peanut butter.

Start Off Each Day Fresh

- If you prepare your child's lunch in the morning before school, avoid time-crunch shortcuts that can lead to foodborne illness. Make sure counter surfaces are clean and last night's food remnants are gone. This helps to prevent cross-contamination.
- Clean your child's lunch box or lunch bag with warm soapy water before each use.

Chill It Right

- If you prepare your child's lunch the night before, keep foods that can spoil in a refrigerator set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Not sure how cool it is in your fridge? Use a refrigerator thermometer to keep tabs on the temp.

Mind Your Fruits and Veggies

- In addition to washing vegetables and ready-to-eat fruits like apples and grapes, rinse peel-and-eat fruits such as bananas and oranges. This eliminates harmful bacteria that can spread during peeling or cutting.

Leave Leftovers Behind

- Lunch leftovers might seem like a good late-afternoon snack, but not all foods can go the distance. Encourage your child to throw away uneaten perishable foods right after lunch.
- Pack non-perishable food items for an afternoon snack.

Wash Up Before Eating

- Teach kids the importance of lathering up before digging in by reinforcing good habits at home. Encourage at least 20 seconds– about the time it takes to sing two choruses of the "Happy Birthday" song – of hand washing in warm soapy water.
- Include a moist towelette or hand sanitizer in your child's lunch box.