

The Lunch Box

Handout C



Safe Lunches for Preschool Children

Packing a lunch that will be safe when your child eats is just as important as packing healthy foods. Children under the age of 5 are at high risk for foodborne illness (food poisoning caused by bacteria).

There are three important considerations when selecting foods for safety:

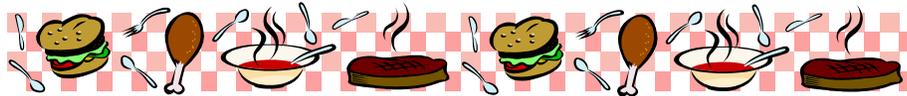
- Type of food
- Temperature
- Time



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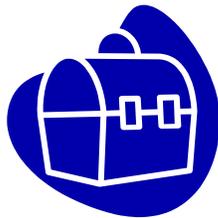


This program was made possible by funds received from Proposition 10 through the Children and Families commission of San Luis Obispo County.



Type of Food

Bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly in certain types of foods. Meats, poultry, fish, dairy products, soft cheeses and cut fruits and vegetables are most likely to be attacked by foodborne bacteria. When packing these foods in your child's lunch, be sure to pack them safely.



Keep these foods cold:

Meats, poultry, fish
Eggs
Milk, soft cheese, yogurt
Peeled and cut fruits & vegetables
Opened fruit juice
Pasta Salad

Keep these foods hot or cold:



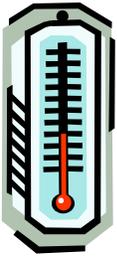
Soups
Chili
Casseroles
Refried & baked beans



These foods are safe at room temperature:

Breads, crackers, cereal
Peanut Butter
Whole, uncut fruits
Unopened canned fruits
Dried fruits
Unopened juice boxes
Hard cheese
Unopened cans of tuna, meats, poultry
Nuts and seeds

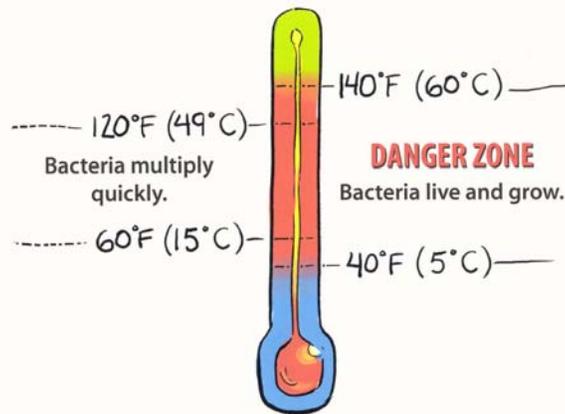
Temperature



Use temperature to keep your child's lunch safe. Keep foods above 140°F or below 40°F. High temperatures kill bacteria and low temperatures slow their growth.

Follow the old saying: **Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold.**

Bacteria like warm temperatures.



Temperature Guide to Food Safety

Susceptible foods held more than 2 hours in the Danger Zone are subject to rapid growth of bacteria and may cause food poisoning.

Time

Bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly. Many foods can become unsafe to eat in just two hours if left at room temperature.



Safe Food Tips

Most foods can be packed safely in your child's lunch. Use these tips to:

- Pack a safe lunch for your child
- Send a greater variety of foods in your child's lunch

Keep it Clean



Every day:

Wash your child's lunch box or bag inside and out

Wash ice packs

Before preparing food:

Wash your hands

Clean cutting boards

Clean food counters

Wash utensils

Keep it Cool

Use an insulated lunch box or bag everyday

Buy an ice pack and use everyday

Pack chilled sandwiches—make the night before and store in refrigerator
If your child's school has a refrigerator for children's lunches, use it



Keep it Hot

Use an insulated container to send hot foods

- Fill the insulated container with boiling water
- Let it stand a few minutes
- Empty the water and add very hot food



Packing a Safe Lunch

Packing a safe lunch is easier than you may think. Here are some examples:

Baked Chicken Leg (*cold*)
Cucumber Circles
Cantaloupe Slices
Oatmeal Cookie
Low-Fat Milk



Which foods need special handling? *The chicken, cut vegetable, cut fruit, and milk.*

Send this lunch safely with your child by putting the milk into an insulated bottle and packing the entire lunch into an insulated lunch box with a frozen ice pack.

½ Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich
Yogurt Cup
Baby Carrots
100% Orange Juice (*in a carton*)



Which foods need special handling? *The yogurt and peeled vegetables.*

Send this lunch safely by packing it in an insulated lunch box with a frozen ice pack.

Leftover Lasagna
Canned Fruit Cup
Water



What food needs special handling? *The lasagna.*

Send this lunch safely by heating the lasagna and putting into an insulated container. Or send the lasagna cold in an insulated lunch box with a frozen ice pack.

Bean and Cheese Burrito
Strawberries
Water



What food need special handling? *The burrito.*

Send this lunch safely by making the burrito the night before and storing in the refrigerator. In the morning, pack the entire lunch in an insulated lunch box with a frozen ice pack. The burrito can safely be eaten cold or warmed up.

Tips from Preschool Staff

“A local pharmacy gives me ice packs that come packed with prescriptions. They work great for keeping lunches cold.”

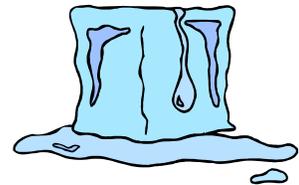
Nipomo

“It’s important that parents get in the habit of using ice packs.”

San Luis Obispo

“Ice packs should be used even on cold days.”

Atascadero



“We let children and parents know that lunches can be stored in our refrigerator. All schools can’t offer that, but since we can, we want our families to use the refrigerator.”

Paso Robles

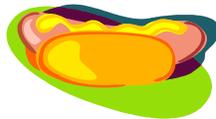


Another Safety Consideration—Choking



Don't overlook the potential of choking when selecting foods for preschool children. Round foods most commonly cause choking. The American Red Cross indicates that small, dry, hard foods and sticky or tough foods are also common causes of choking

Foods likely to cause choking are whole hot dogs, hard candy, whole nuts, whole grapes, chewing gum, lollipops, popcorn, spoonfuls of peanut butter, and chunks of food like meat or fruit.



Choking hazards can be reduced if you:

Cut grapes in half

Chop nuts

Spread peanut butter thinly on bread, crackers or vegetables

Slice or chop chunks of food

Cut hot dogs into quarters lengthwise

Hard candy, chewing gum, lollipops, and popcorn should not be served to children under 5 years old.



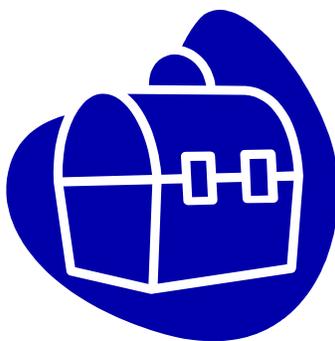
Did You Know?

One in four people living in the United States will have food poisoning this year.

Common food poisoning symptoms are nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. In severe cases, people can die.

Good hand washing, keeping the kitchen clean, and storing foods at the proper temperature can help reduce food poisoning.

Unpasteurized milk and juices are not safe for young children. They can be sources of harmful bacteria like *E. coli*.



More information

For more information on food safety and packing safe lunches:

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline 1-800-535-4555

Log on to Fight BAC! at www.fightbac.org

The Lunch Box is a series of handouts designed for San Luis Obispo County parents who pack lunches for their preschool children. The goal of these handouts is to assist parents in packing lunches that are nutritious, safe and appealing for preschool children.

The author acknowledges the cooperation of nine San Luis Obispo County preschools that assisted in the development of the Lunch Box program.

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