

## School Lunch Food Safety Tips

This week and next week youth and adults will be heading back to school this week or the next few weeks. While many will be eating school lunches, many will be taking their lunch.

While preparing and taking lunches to school it is important to consider food safety.

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 97 percent of consumers failed to wash their hands properly when preparing a meal.
- One in six Americans get a foodborne illness each year.
- Children represent half of all hospitalizations for foodborne illness in the United States each year.

Remember these principles Clean, Separate, and Chill when preparing lunches for your children.

**CLEAN:** Wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds. Wash your cutting boards, utensils, and counter tops with hot, soapy water. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Make sure reusable lunch bags and coolers are clean before packing.

**SEPARATE:** Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a different one for meat and poultry. This will help you avoid cross-contamination or spreading bacteria from one food product to another.

Pack a hot lunch like soup or stew in insulated containers to keep it hot. Fill a container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty and then put in the hot food. Tell your children to keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot at least 140 Degrees or above.

**CHILL:** Bacteria hates the cold. Keep your food cold until lunchtime by using an insulated lunch bag or cooler. Perishable food can be unsafe to eat at lunchtime in a paper bag.

If lunches are packed the night before. Leave it in the refrigerator overnight. The meal will stay cold longer because everything will be refrigerator temperature when it is placed in the lunchbox.

Also have at least two cold sources for lunches that contain perishable food items like meats, eggs, cheese, or yogurt. This can include frozen juice boxes or water. This will help keep food chilled until lunchtime.

If you are responsible for packing snacks for a team or youth group, keep perishable foods in a cooler with ice or cold packs until snack time. Pack snacks in individual bags or containers, rather than having kids share food from one serving dish.

**Source: [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) and Partnership for Food Safety**