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The Lunch Box Series, C: Safe Lunches for Preschool Children

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Author

Peterson, Shirley

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the Lunch box

HANDOUT C
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SAFE LUNCHES FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Packing a lunch that will be safe when your child eats it 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



Type of Food

Bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly in certain types of foods. Meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, soft cheese, 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:

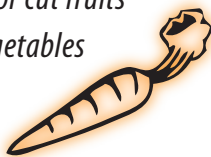
- meat, poultry, fish

- eggs



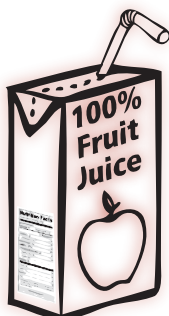
- milk, soft cheese, yogurt

- peeled or cut fruits and vegetables



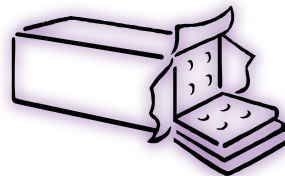
- fruit juice containers that have been opened

- pasta salad



These foods are safe at room temperature:

- bread, crackers, cereal



- peanut butter

- whole, uncut fruit and vegetables

- unopened canned fruit

- dried fruit

- unopened juice boxes

- hard cheese, nuts, and seeds

- unopened cans of tuna, meats, or poultry



Keep these foods hot or cold:

- soups



- chili

- casseroles



- refried or baked beans

Temperature

Follow this saying:

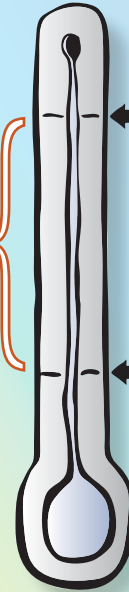
Keep **hot** foods **hot** and **cold** foods **cold**.

Use temperature to keep your child's lunch safe.

Keep foods either above 140°F or below 40°F.

High temperatures kill bacteria and low temperatures slow their growth.

DANGER ZONE



← 140°F (60°C) **HOT**

Bacteria like warm temperatures.

← 40°F (5°C) **COLD**

Temperature Guide to Food Safety

Perishable foods held in the Danger Zone (40°F to 140°F) are subject to rapid growth of bacteria that may cause food poisoning.

Time

Bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly.

Food can become unsafe to eat in just **2 hours** if left at room temperature.

Foods held at room temperatures above 90°F can become unsafe in 1 hour.

DID YOU KNOW?

- One person in four 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.

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 you prepare food:

- Wash your hands.
- Clean cutting boards.
- Clean food counters.
- Wash utensils.

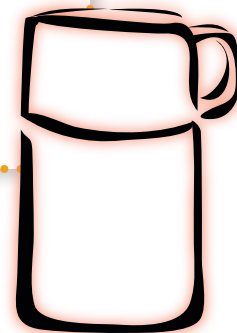
Keep It Cool

- Use an insulated lunch box or bag every day.
- Buy an ice pack and use it every day.
- Pack a chilled sandwich—make it the night before and store it in the 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.
- First, fill the insulated container with boiling water.
- Then let it stand a few minutes.
- Empty the water and add the very hot food.

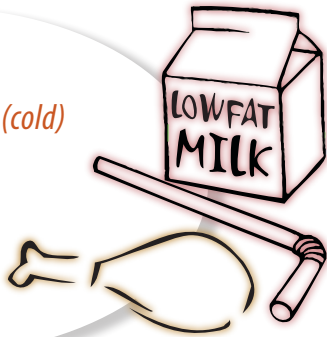


Packing a Safe Lunch

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

Example 1

- baked chicken leg (cold)
- cucumber circles
- cantaloupe slices
- oatmeal cookie
- low-fat milk



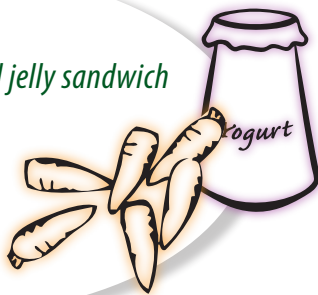
Which foods in this lunch need special handling?

Answer: 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.

Example 2

- ½ peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- yogurt cup
- baby carrots
- 100% orange juice (in a juice box)



Which foods in this lunch need special handling?

Answer: The yogurt and the peeled carrots.

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

Example 3

- leftover lasagna
- canned fruit cup
- water



Which food in this lunch needs special handling?

Answer: The lasagna.

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

Example 4

- bean and cheese burrito
- sliced strawberries
- water



Which foods in this lunch need special handling?

Answer: The burrito and cut strawberries.

Send this lunch safely by making the burrito the night before and storing it 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 reheated.

Tips from Preschool Staff

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

— Preschool Director

"It's important that parents get in the habit of using ice packs."

— Preschool Teacher

"Ice packs should be used even on cold days."

— Preschool Director

"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."

— Preschool Aide

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 and lollipops
- whole nuts
- whole grapes and cherries
- chewing gum
- popcorn
- spoonfuls of peanut butter
- chunks of food like meat or fruit

Reduce Choking Hazards

The danger of choking can be reduced if you:

- cut grapes and cherries 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 and lollipops, chewing gum, and popcorn should not be served to children under 5 years old.

More Information

For more information on packing nutritious lunches for your child, log on to <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

- USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline 888-674-6854, or email mpholine.fsis@usda.gov
- Fight BAC! at www.fightbac.org

The Lunch Box is a series of handouts designed for 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 the San Luis Obispo County preschools that assisted in the development of the *Lunch Box* program. This program was made possible by funds received from the First 5 Commission of San Luis Obispo County.



You will find related information in these titles and in other publications, slide sets, CD-ROMs, and videos from UC ANR:

Children and Weight: What's a Parent to Do?, DVD 6524D

EatFit Teacher's Curriculum, Publication 3424

Fit Families Novela Series, Publication 3496

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