

Food Safety for Packed Lunches

Food safety tips and guidelines for packing your child a lunch for school



Why it's Important

Packing a lunch for your child can be easy and simple if food safety guidelines are followed. If you are packing perishable food items in their lunch, those food items need to be kept cold/hot. Bacteria can start to grow in the "temperature danger zone" which is between 40°F and 140°F. Bacteria can easily grow when food is stored at room temperature. When food with bacteria is ingested, it can cause foodborne illnesses and make someone really sick.

Type of Lunch Box

Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are best for keeping foods cold. Brown bags should try to be avoided if packing perishable food items because brown bags will not be able to keep foods cold/hot.



Keeping Cold Lunches Cold

Allow cold foods to stay refrigerated until it is time for your child to leave for school. To keep food cold in a lunch box, include at least 2 cold sources. You can use 2 frozen ice packs or use 1 frozen ice pack and a frozen water bottle or a frozen juice box. Place 1 cold source on bottom of lunch and 1 cold source on top of lunch. If using a frozen water bottle or juice box, they should be thawed and ready to drink by lunchtime.



Keeping Hot Lunches Hot

If packing food items like soup, mac & cheese, or chili, use an insulated container or thermos. Fill the container with boiling water and wait a few minutes. Then empty the water and place the hot food item in the container immediately. Make sure the insulated container stays closed until lunchtime to ensure food stays at 140°F or above.

Wash your Hands

Before packing your child's lunch it is important that you first wash your hands. This will prevent any possibility of cross-contamination when preparing your child's lunch and will stop the spread of any germs.



Separate

If preparing raw foods for a child's lunch like cooking chicken, make sure to keep raw food separate from ready-to-eat foods. This will help you avoid any cross-contamination. Make sure to never use the same cutting board for raw foods and ready-to-eat foods. For example do not use the same cutting board that you used for raw chicken, for fruits and vegetables.

Fruits & Vegetables

Whole fruits like apples, oranges, bananas, and pears are great non-perishable options for lunch. Always wash fruits and vegetables before placing them in your child's lunch. Cut fruits and vegetables are considered perishable and need to be kept cold (40°F or below).



Non-Perishable Food Items

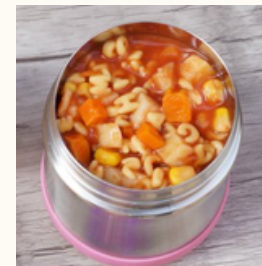
There are many food items that you can pack in your child's lunch that are non-perishable. Some of these items are :

- Whole fruits like bananas and apples
- Dried fruits like raisins
- Nuts
- Grains like bread and crackers
- Jerky (beef, chicken, turkey, etc.)
- Pretzels and chips
- Granola Bars
- Fruit Snacks
- Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches

Example of Non-Perishable Lunch



Example of Perishable Lunch



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