



Hints and advice for making packed lunches safe to eat

While packing a lunch, parents and students should keep in mind which foods will keep at room temperature and which ones will spoil. Lunches are often kept unrefrigerated in backpacks for four to six hours, much longer than the recommended two hours for items such as meat, eggs, milk and poultry. Food-borne illness is a threat with these foods since bacteria and toxins can form rapidly under warm conditions.



Tips for avoiding serious consequences of food-borne illness:

- Perishable foods should be prepared either immediately before use, or kept cold until they will be eaten.
- Insulated lunch bags or lunch boxes with reusable gel packs are effective at keeping cold foods at the proper temperature.
- Frozen juice boxes work well with brown bags; the juice will thaw by lunch and still keep the bag cold.
- Lunches should be kept away from heat sources like radiators, baseboards and direct sunlight, so food can stay fresh longer.
- When preparing soups, stews or chili for lunches, make sure they are kept hot. Bring the foods to a boil and put them into a preheated Thermos or similar insulated container. To preheat the container, fill it with boiling water and let stand for two minutes, then empty and fill with hot food.
- Cleanliness is another important factor in keeping food safe to eat. When preparing the food, be sure to use clean utensils and wash hands thoroughly. Teach children to do the same before eating. Wash fruits and vegetables before packing them in a lunch.
- If using canned products, clean the top lid to remove any bacteria that may be present.



Keep one simple rule in mind; when in doubt, throw it out. If the food you are putting in a lunch does not look or smell good, throw it out!

Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot!

