



# FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

## Back to School Food Safety

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Whether it's off to school or work, many carry "bag" lunches. These lunches can be kept safe by following some

simple steps. First handle and cook food safely. Then keep perishable food cold while



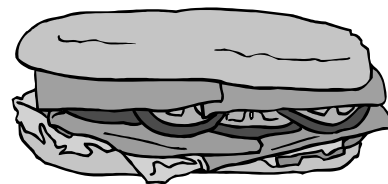
commuting by bus, bicycle, on foot, or in a car. After arriving at school or work, perishable food must be kept cold until lunchtime.

Why keep food cold? Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly in the "danger zone" — the temperatures between 40° and 140° F. So, perishable food transported without an ice source won't stay safe long, (see page 3). When writing your back to school shopping list, don't forget to include an insulated lunch bag.

Here are some safe handling recommendations to prevent foodborne illness from "bag" lunches.

### Begin with Safe Food

Perishable food, such as raw or cooked meat and poultry, must be kept cold or frozen at the store and at home. Eggs should be purchased cold at the store and kept cold at home. Transport perishable food, from store to home as quickly as possible, when no ice source is available.



Do not leave food out at room temperature more than two hours (one hour if the temperature is above 90° F).

Pre-packed combos that contain luncheon meats along with crackers, cheese, and condiments must also be kept refrigerated. This includes luncheon meats and smoked ham which are cured or contain preservatives.



## Packing Lunches

Pack just the amount of perishable food that can be eaten at lunch. That way, there won't be a problem about the storage or safety of leftovers. It's fine to prepare the food the night before and store the packed lunch in the refrigerator. Freezing sandwiches helps them stay cold. However, for best quality, don't freeze sandwiches containing mayonnaise, lettuce, or tomatoes. Add these later.

Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are

best for keeping food cold, but metal or plastic lunch boxes and paper bags can also be used. If using paper lunch bags, create layers by doubling bags to help insulate the food. An ice source should be packed with perishable food in any type of lunch bag or box.



## Keeping Cold Lunches Cold and Hot Lunches Hot

Prepare cooked food, such as turkey, ham, chicken, and vegetable or pasta salads, ahead of time to allow for thorough chilling in the refrigerator. Divide large amounts of food into shallow containers for fast chilling and easier use. Keep cooked food refrigerated until time to leave home.

To keep lunches cold away from home, include a small frozen gel pack or frozen juice box. Of course, if there's a refrigerator available, store perishable items there upon arrival.

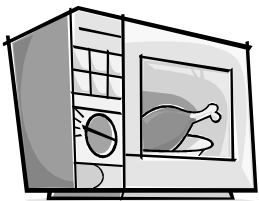
Freezer gel packs will keep cold

**Add frozen juice boxes to keep lunches cold**

foods (such as meat sandwiches) safe from morning until lunchtime. However, the gel packs generally will not safely hold perishable foods past lunchtime, so any leftovers should be discarded and not brought back home.

Use an insulated container to keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot—140° or above.

## Microwave Cooking/Reheating



When using the microwave oven to reheat lunches, cover food to hold in moisture and promote safe, even heating. Reheat leftovers to at least 165° F.

Midway through cooking and as needed:

- Turn dish.

- Reposition dish on rotating turntable
- Rearrange or stir food.
- Turn large food items over

Use only microwave-safe dishes. Allow reheated foods to stand briefly before eating them. People have been burned by foods that appeared cooler on the surface than they turned out to be inside.

# Don't Cross-Contaminate

When preparing lunches, always start by washing your hands and making sure your work area is clean. Harmful bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, and countertops.

Be sure to wash the cutting board after cutting raw meat and poultry and before using it for food that will not be cooked, such as bread, lettuce, and tomatoes. If possible, use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate board for meat, fish

and poultry.

At lunchtime, discard all used food packaging and paper bags. Do not reuse plastic bags because they could contaminate other food and cause foodborne illness. Always wash reusable containers with hot soapy water. Lunch bags should also be cleaned inside and out on a daily basis.



# Packing for Safety

**These foods.....**

**Must be kept cold**

**Safe at room temperature**

Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooked pasta, rice and other cooked grains or cereals</li> <li>• Any salads, soups or dishes made with cooked grains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread and crackers</li> <li>• Cookies</li> <li>• Dry cereals</li> </ul>
Fruit Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut fruit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All whole fruit</li> <li>• Unopened fruit juices</li> </ul>
Vegetable Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All cooked vegetables</li> <li>• Peeled or cut raw vegetables</li> <li>• Sprouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All uncut or unpeeled vegetables</li> <li>• Unopened vegetable juice</li> </ul>
Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milk and milk drinks</li> <li>• Custards and pudding</li> <li>• All foods containing cheese (like pizza and casseroles)</li> <li>• Yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unopened shelf-stable milk and unopened shelf-stable puddings</li> </ul>
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nuts Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cooked beans, or sandwiches; salads or other dishes made with these</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nuts and nut butters</li> <li>• Dry soup mixes</li> </ul>
Fats, Oils and Sweets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gravy and sauces</li> <li>• Foods made with mayonnaise</li> <li>• Butter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candy</li> <li>• Ketchup and mustard</li> <li>• Margarine, oil</li> </ul>