

# Food Safety Tips for Packing a School Lunch

Food Safety Education Program

<http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety>

To prevent foodborne illness, it is important to understand how food becomes unsafe to eat and what proactive steps can be taken to keep food safe.

**Some foods require time and temperature control to limit the growth of pathogenic or disease-causing foodborne microorganisms.** Pathogens that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly at temperatures between 41 and 140 °F. In just 2 hours, these microorganisms can multiply to dangerous levels, which can cause foodborne illness; 1 hour if temperatures are above 90 °F. Bacterial growth is slowed or limited below 41 °F and above 140 °F. **To make sure packed lunches are safe to eat, follow the 4 simple steps: clean, separate, cook, and chill to prevent of foodborne illness.** [For more information, visit: <http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety/cause-and-prevention-of-foodborne-illness>].

## Food Safety Tips for Packing Lunch Box:

- Before beginning any food preparation, always wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds and dry with a disposable paper towel or clean hand cloth.
- Clean food contact surfaces (e.g., counter top, cutting boards, utensils, etc.) often, between tasks, and if they become contaminated. Wash food contact surfaces with hot, soapy water and either air dry or use a clean cloth, or disposable paper towel to dry.
- Sanitizers can be used for added protection. [For more information, visit: <http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety/cause-and-prevention-of-foodborne-illness>].
- Clean lunch boxes often with hot, soapy water and either air dry or use a clean cloth, or disposable paper towel to dry.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables under running water and dry thoroughly before packing.
- To prevent cross-contamination, don't reuse

packaging materials, such as plastic bags, paper and foil food wraps.

- If the lunch contains perishable food, like lunch meats, eggs, cheese or yogurt, make sure to keep it cold. [For more information, visit: <http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety/time-temperature-control-for-safe-food>]
  - Prepare and store the food in the refrigerator overnight. The food will stay cold longer because it will be at refrigerator temperature before putting it in the lunch box.
  - Place ice or gel packs around the food.
  - Freeze water bottles or juice boxes to place in the lunch box. (These could be used with ice packs and not alone, for added temperature control).
  - Pack hot foods in an insulated thermos while the food is hot; don't wait for it to cool before packing. You can also preheat your thermos by filling it with boiling water, letting it sit for a few minutes, pouring out the water, and then adding your hot food.
- Some foods don't need to be refrigerated to be safe. Peanut butter, jelly, cookies, crackers, chips, dried fruit, and certain whole fruits (bananas, apples, and oranges) can be eaten safely at room temperature.
- After lunch, throw away uneaten perishable food.
- Finally, **be aware of food allergens and school food allergy policies.** [For more information, visit: <http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety/food-allergies>].

## Resources for More Information:

- [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety)
- [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)
- [www.Fightbac.org](http://www.Fightbac.org)