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<http://www.co.macomb.mi.us/publichealth/>

# ***Back to School Tips for Packing a Safe Lunch***



## **KEEP IT CLEAN!**

Bacteria that cause foodborne illness can be found on your hands, unclean surfaces and utensils and unwashed fruits and vegetables.

- ◆ Wash your hands before handling food
- ◆ Make sure utensils and food preparation surfaces are clean
- ◆ Always wash fruits and vegetables before packing them in your child's lunch
- ◆ Teach your children to wash their hands before they eat. Hand sanitizers and moist towelettes can be used in a pinch.



## **KEEP IT COLD!**

Bacteria that may be present in food can rapidly multiply between the temperatures of 41°F and 140°F. Perishable foods should be kept cold to limit the growth of harmful bacteria.

- ◆ If you make sandwiches the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until packing in the morning. Lunchmeat sandwiches can also be frozen. The sandwich will thaw by lunchtime but will still be cold.
- ◆ Use freezer gel packs and an insulated lunch box to keep foods cold until lunchtime. A frozen juice box can also be used to keep foods cold and in addition becomes a nice slushy treat for your child.
- ◆ If your child carries his/her lunch in a paper bag, it is especially important to provide a cold source. To prevent the bag from becoming soggy, seal a freezer gel pack in a plastic sandwich bag. Double-bagging will also help insulate the food better.

- ◆ Tell your child to use a refrigerator at school if one is available. They should also keep their lunch away from direct sunlight or heat sources such as window ledges and radiators.
- ◆ Use non-perishable, shelf-stable foods in your child's lunch. These include fresh fruits, vegetables, crackers, packaged puddings, canned fruits, canned or packaged meats/tuna and packaged cheese

## **KEEP IT HOT!**

Most foodborne bacteria grow *fastest* at temperatures from 70°F to 120°F. Hot foods must be thoroughly heated until boiling or steaming to kill harmful bacteria and then held hot.

- ◆ Use an insulated bottle or thermos to keep foods such as soup, chili or stew hot.
- ◆ Preheat the bottle or thermos with boiling water before filling with food product.
- ◆ Keep the bottle closed until lunchtime.
- ◆ Any perishable food not eaten at lunch should be discarded.

