



# Safe School Lunches

March 2010 Clinton County Health Department and your school cafeteria

**So you've packed your little scholar a nutritious mid day meal. But is it safe? Packing a lunch that will be safe when your child is ready to eat it is just as important as packing healthy foods. Here's some information to help in the packing process.**

## 3 Steps to a Safer Lunch

**1. Start Clean Everyday.** Wash your child's lunch box or bag, ice packs, utensils and containers after each use with warm, soapy water. Wash your hands and disinfect surfaces before preparing food.

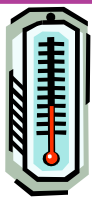
**2. Know When to Chill.** Some foods are safe at room temperature, some can make us sick. Review the chart below to learn more about foods that are best eaten cold.

**3. Plan accordingly.** That means, if you make lunches ahead of time, keep items in the refrigerator overnight. Also, if a refrigerator is available at school, encourage kids to store their lunches there as soon as they arrive, even if ice packs are used. If no refrigerator is available, pack foods that need to be kept cold closest to the icepack. If foods are going to need to be reheated, be sure a microwave is available and your child knows how to safely use it or will have the help they need. Also make sure these items are packed in microwave safe containers. Lastly, know when its time to toss. If lunch is over, do not keep any uneaten food that needs to be kept chilled.

Following these 3 easy steps will ensure lunch is safe, nutritious and delicious.

## Other Tips from Lunch Packing Pros

- When preparing lunch items from leftovers, be sure countertops and cutting boards have been cleaned since coming into contact with uncooked foods.
- Freezing juice packs or water bottles can add extra chill to a packed lunch.
- Do not store lunches in direct sunlight or near heat sources, such as radiators, or baseboards.
- If packing hot items, such as soup or chili, in a thermos, preheat the thermos by filling with hot water and letting it sit for 2-3 minutes. Then pour the water out and fill with the hot food. This will boost the heat holding capacity of the thermos.



## To Chill or Not to Chill... Banishing the Bacterium

Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly between the temperatures of 40 to 140 degrees F, also known as "the danger zone". If food is stored between those temperatures, it can become unsafe to eat in as little as 2 hours! Read on to see if your lunchbox favorites are safe at room temperature or better off on ice.

| Food Group                       | Pack on Ice   | Safe at Room Temperatures  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Meat, Fish, Bean, Egg, Nut Group | any meat, poultry eggs, cooked beans or sandwiches, salads, or other dishes made with these foods. Also chill tofu, soy products and other meat substitutes | Nuts, nut butters, dry soup mixes, seeds                                   |
| Milk, Yogurt, Cheese group       | milk and milk drinks, yogurt, custards and puddings, all foods containing cheese like pizza and casseroles  | unopened, shelf stable milk and puddings                                   |
| Vegetable and Fruit Groups       | All cooked, peeled or cut fruits and veggies<br>Opened fruit juice  | whole fruit, vegetables, dried fruit, unopened fruit/vegetable juice./cups |
| Bread, Cereal, Rice, Pasta Group | cooked pasta, rice or other grains  | bread, crackers, dry cereals   |
| Fats & Oils Group                | gravy, sauces, mayonnaise, butter   | ketchup, mustard   |