



Denita Young
County Extension Agent - FCS
Rains County

Pack a Safe School Lunch

Where has the summer school vacation gone? I can't believe the kids are already back in school! While you were out with your child purchasing new school supplies, you probably discussed whether they would be eating in the school cafeteria or bringing their lunch from home.

The meals prepared by our school are nutritious and meet nutrient requirements, as well as, have limits on the amount of fat in the food. However, if your child is a "picky" eater, they may prefer to pack a lunch from home. When planning your child's meal, let them be involved in the planning process. It will teach them food preparation skills, reinforces food safety habits, and it lets children take "ownership" of their meal. Make sure you try to include food from each of the food groups; grains, fruits, vegetables, meats, and milk.

Let's discuss keeping a packed lunch safe. Make sure you wash your hands before you handle the food, keep the food preparation area clean, and keep the perishable foods out of the temperature danger zone (40-140 degrees F.) until lunchtime. Did you know that bacteria can double in number every 20 to 30 minutes? At room temperature just 1 bacterium (germ) could grow to as many as 4,096 bacteria in 4 hours! Also, make sure you clean the lunchbox daily. Throw away all food packages, paper bags, and uneaten food.

Consider putting foods that are safe at room temperature into your child's lunchbox. Some examples are nuts & nut butters (i.e. peanut butter), unopened containers of pudding, unopened juice boxes, dried and canned fruit, unopened canned meat and meat dishes, bread, cereal, crackers, cookies, chips, and whole fruit.

Foods that **MUST** be kept cold are meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cooked beans or sandwiches/salads made with these foods, lunch meat, cheese, salad dressing/mayonnaise, milk, pudding, cut fruit, cut vegetables, cooked pasta, and cooked rice. Insulated soft-sided lunch bags are best at keeping foods cold, but you must also use ice packs inside the lunchbox to keep your foods cold.

If you are sending soup, chili or stew to school you need to follow these steps to be safe:

- 1) Fill the bottle with boiling water; let stand for a few minutes to heat the bottle,
- 2) heat soup, chili, or stew until it is 165 degrees F.,
- 3) pour out the boiling water from the bottle,
- 4) fill the bottle with hot soup, chili, or stew.

By following these suggestions you will keep your child safe from foodborne illnesses. For more help or information, please feel free to contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 160.

The information herein is for educational purposes only. References to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended or no endorsement by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service is implied.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.