**Simple food safety tips for packing school lunches**

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Superior, Wis.--Keep food safety in mind as you prepare your child’s school lunch, says Barbara Ingham, University of Wisconsin-Extension food science specialist. Ingham has some recommendations for packing a safe lunch.

–Make sure your hands, food preparation surfaces and utensils are clean. Use hot, soapy water to help remove bacteria. Keep family pets away from food preparation areas and off kitchen counters. And encourage your children to always wash their hands before they eat or help you in the kitchen.

–Rinse fruits and vegetables before packing them in your child’s lunch. Rinse them under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten**.** Blot dry with a paper towel before packing. Be sure to keep cut or sliced fruits cold. Sliced peaches or bananas, or other light-colored fruit, will benefit from dipping in lemon juice or sprinkling with a commercial anti-browning preparation to keep them looking their best.

–Keep hot foods (soup, chili, stew) hot by using an insulated bottle**.** Fill the bottle with boiling water and let it stand for a few minutes. Empty the bottle and then fill it with piping hot food. Keep the bottle closed until lunchtime. Discard leftovers that arrive home in the insulated bottle at the end of the school day.

–Cold foods should stay cold.If you pack a cold lunch the night before, it will stay cool longer the next morning. Insulated, soft-sided lunch totes can help keep perishable foods chilled; simply add a cold source, such as a small frozen gel pack or frozen juice box. Any perishable food (meat, poultry or egg sandwiches, or dairy products) not eaten at lunch should be discarded.

–Sometimes a field trip will require that lunch be packed in a brown paper sack. When that is the case, opt for non-perishable foods such as peanut butter or cheese sandwiches, crackers, or packaged pudding or fruit. A frozen juice box will serve as a disposable cold source and should be thawed and ready to drink by lunchtime.

And speaking of containers, resist the urge to reuse plastic sandwich or bread bags when packing school lunches, Ingham says. Bacteria can spread from one product to another, increasing the chance of spoilage or illness.

Learn more about packing safe lunches at Fight BAC!® [http://www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org/) and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [http://www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org/)

Contact Douglas County Extension office to learn more about safe food handling.

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