



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

HOCKING COUNTY HEALTH **DEPARTMENT**

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Many parents are jumping for joy as summer break ends and school is back in session. Packing student lunches at home is a great way to be sure a child is eating healthy at school. However, parents need to be sure the packed food is safe for their children to eat. It's important to keep in mind food safety when packing a lunch for a child as children are more susceptible to food borne illness than adults.

The USDA has some recommendations and tips for parents when packing school lunches. Keep in mind that cold foods need to be kept below forty degrees Fahrenheit and hot items should be kept above 140 degrees Fahrenheit while in a lunch bag. These temperatures can be difficult to maintain from morning until lunch time. The USDA has provided these tips to follow:

- Items such as luncheon meats, eggs or yogurt are perishable foods. Be sure to pack these items along with at least two freezer packs. If these items get too warm, bacteria can grow rapidly and the food will no longer be safe to eat.
- Use frozen juice boxes as freezer packs. Freeze these items overnight and use with at least one other ice pack. The juice box should be thawed by lunchtime and ready to drink.
- Pack lunches containing perishable foods in an insulated lunchbox. Perishable food can become unsafe to eat by lunchtime if packed in a paper bag.
- If a refrigerator is available, the child should store his/her lunch in there until lunchtime. Leave the lunch bag open so the cold air in the refrigerator can reach the food.
- Hot lunches, such as soup or chili, should be stored in an insulated container to keep it hot. Fill the container with boiling water and let it stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the hot food. This will keep the inside of the container hot enough until lunchtime. Be sure to tell the child not to open the container until they are ready to eat his/her lunch.
- Do not reuse packaging because it could contaminate other foods and cause foodborne illness. Discard all leftover food, used packaging (such as sandwich bags) and paper bags.
- If packing a child's lunch the night before, parents should leave it in the refrigerator overnight. The meal will stay cooler longer because everything will be refrigerator temperature when placed in the lunch box.

Parents with any food safety questions can call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854 or visit the website www.foodsafety.gov.

Have a safe and healthy school year!