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Prepared by: Cathi Lamp

PACK A SAFE LUNCH 101- QUICK TIPS TO PACKING A SAFE SCHOOL LUNCH

It's back-to-school time again, and time to remind parents and families across the country that the first important lesson of the school year is packing a *safe* lunch. Here is a quick refresher course:

- ▶ Always keep it clean. Make sure your hands, food preparation surfaces, and utensils are clean. Use hot, soapy water to effectively get rid of bacteria. Teach your children to wash their hands before they eat. Also, wash fruits and vegetables before packing them in your child's lunch.
- ▶ Cold foods should stay cold, so invest in a freezer gel pack (available in supermarkets and kitchen supply stores) and an insulated lunch box. Freezer gel packs will keep foods cold until lunchtime, but are not recommended for all-day storage. Any perishable food (i.e., meat, poultry, or egg sandwiches) not eaten at lunch should be thrown away.
- ▶ Be sure to keep hot foods such as soup, chili or 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.
- ▶ If your child chooses a *paper* bag to carry lunch, it's especially important to include a cold source. A freezer gel pack or a frozen sandwich works well. Because brown paper bags tend to become soggy or leak as cold foods thaw, be sure to use an extra paper bag to create a double layer. Double bagging will also help insulate the food better.
- ▶ Tell your child to use the refrigerator at school, if one is available. If not, make sure they keep their lunch out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources in the classroom.

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Page 2 - Pack A Safe Lunch 101 - Quick Tips To Packing A Safe School Lunch.wpd

- ▶ Every parent should have a supply of shelf-stable foods for easy packing. These include fresh fruits and vegetables, crackers, peanut butter sandwiches, packaged pudding, and canned fruits or meats.
- ▶ Freeze single-sized juice packs overnight and place the frozen drink in your child's lunch. The juice will thaw by lunchtime, but it will still be cold. The frozen drink will also keep the rest of the lunch cold.
- ▶ If you make sandwiches the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until packing up to go in the morning.

September is National Food Safety Month. However, you can celebrate “safe food” all year long by following these simple practices when packing your child’s lunch for school.

For more information safe food preparation and storage visit the federal government food safety web site at www.foodsafety.gov.

Source: www.fightbac.org

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