

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Family and Consumer Sciences
Cooperative Extension Service

Contact: *Sara Budge*

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Pack It Safe!

Is that packed lunch safe for your child? With the school year underway, a number of parents are sending packed lunches with their children. As you prepare these meals, be sure that you make food safety a part of your routine.

Keeping food safe begins even before handling the food with clean hands, utensils and packaging. Use a new paper bag everyday. Use new plastic bags or wraps for foods. This helps prevent cross contamination and potential food poisoning.

A lunch that won't be refrigerated needs special considerations. For a sandwich, use a frozen meat spread or frozen meat loaf as the sandwich filling. If the lunch will be at room temperature for 3 to 4 hours, don't pack egg, meat or creamy mixtures. Peanut butter or aged cheeses are safer choices. Pack a single-size serving container of tuna or another meat. Also remember to wrap toppings like lettuce and tomato separately, to be put on the sandwich when eaten.

Use a wide-mouthed insulated container for soups, stews, casserole servings, or other foods that need to be kept hot.

When packing fruits and vegetables, pack sliced items in new plastic bags or wraps. Single servings sizes of canned fruits and fruit juices can be frozen and packed. They will be thawed by lunch time and can help keep the entire lunch cold until eaten. A wide mouthed insulated container can also be used to keep a salad cold and fresh.

For dessert, consider packing a pudding cup, especially if milk isn't part of the lunch. A muffin is also a safe choice. Or try dried fruit or a dried granola mix for some variety. Never pack homemade custards or puddings if refrigeration isn't available.

If you are using an insulated lunch bag, be sure that it works. Research indicates that many insulated containers may not keep food as cold or safe as they should. Pack a "trial lunch" on a day you're home and put a food thermometer on top of a non-refrigerated food, like a cookie or muffin. Let it set for the amount of time you would on a working or school day, then check the thermometer. If the thermometer is above 40 degrees, it is in

the danger zone. Potentially hazardous food should not be left above 40 degrees for more than 2 hours.

In purchasing an insulated lunch box, read the fine print to see if it has been tested. Also, try these tips for safe lunches: Pack food that is already cold. Don't expect the container to cool the food. Insert a frozen ice pack or frozen juice box to keep things cool. Be sure your container fastens securely.

Remember, it's in your hands to "Pack It Safe" for your loved ones. You can prevent food borne illness.

For more information contact Sara Budge, Teton County Environmental Health, 732-8490 or check your University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service food and nutrition website at www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition.

Wyoming Food Safety Coalition training members are from Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service; Wyoming Department of Agriculture; and City/County Health Departments.

The University of Wyoming and United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.

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