



## Tips to Pack a Safe Lunch

Locally grown food always makes a good lunch. You can feel good about the nutrition that you are receiving as well as the benefit to your local community. Here are some tips to consider when packing lunches.

Always keep it clean. Wash your hands with warm water and soap, and use hot, soapy water to make sure food preparation surfaces and utensils are clean. Teach your children to wash their hands with warm water and soap before they eat.

Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water and blot dry with a paper towel before packing them in your lunch.

Insulated, soft-sided lunch totes are best for keeping perishable food cold, but metal or plastic lunch boxes and paper bags can also be used. If using paper lunch bags, create layers by double bagging to help insulate the food. A cold source, such as a small frozen gel pack or frozen water bottle, should be packed with perishable food in any type of lunch bag. After lunch, discard all used food packaging and paper bags. Do not reuse paper or plastic bags.

Freezer gel packs will keep foods cold until lunchtime, but are not recommended for all-day storage. Any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, egg sandwiches, fresh-cut fruits and vegetables) not eaten at lunch should be thrown away. If you make sandwiches the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until packing time.

When making cold sandwiches, start with cold ingredients – filling, bread and toppings. If you will be making egg or chicken salad, make sure all the ingredients for that are cold when mixed together. Put the eggs or chicken along with the mayonnaise and all other ingredients in the refrigerator for several hours so it is cold when combined with other ingredients.

The goal should be to keep all food out of the danger zone which is 40 to 140 degrees F. With a little planning, local, fresh foods can be added to your lunch without sacrificing safety.

The Northeast Iowa Food & Farm (NIFF) Coalition and the Food & Fitness Initiative are working together to create community environments that support access to fresh, locally grown, healthy, affordable food and safe environments for physical activity and play. More information about these programs can be found at [www.niffcoalition.org](http://www.niffcoalition.org).