

MAKING A DIFFERENCE *for Iowans*

Clippings



Lyon • O'Brien • Osceola • Sioux Counties

A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of August 17, 2015

For Immediate Release

The Most Important School Supplies

*Renee Sweers, Human Sciences Specialist, Nutrition and Health
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach*

Don't forget the insulated lunch box and freezer gel packs when shopping for school supplies. In fact, for children who bring their lunch to school, I consider them the most important items on the school supply list. If lunch is packed in an old fashioned paper bag, it may be unsafe to eat by lunch time causing children to become sick.

Bacteria love room temperature. In fact, they multiply quickly at temperatures in the Temperature Danger Zone, 40 -140°F. Perishable foods should not be held at these temperatures for more than two hours to keep harmful bacteria from growing. Studies have shown that foods packed in a non-insulated bag without a freezer pack warm up to the temperature danger zone quite quickly. This even applied to foods that were refrigerated or frozen the night before. Studies showed the critical factor in keeping the lunches cold was the insulated bag and freezer packs. So make this most important investment for a healthy school year and don't forget insulated bags for adults that carry lunch also.

Other lunch box safety tips:

Start Cold:

- Refrigerate lunch items the night before so that everything is cold when it goes into the lunch box the next day.
- Freeze juice boxes or other small beverage bottles and pack them frozen. They will likely be thawed by lunch time and act as a freezer pack to keep the rest of the lunch cold.
- Remember that pre-packaged combos that contain lunchmeat and cheese require refrigeration.
- Purchasing milk at school is inexpensive and deliciously cold and safe.

Start Clean:

- Wash hands and all surfaces before making lunches. Remind children to wash hands before eating their lunch.
- Use clean packaging, bags, containers and utensils. Be sure to wash lunch boxes after each use with warm soapy water. Throw out all used food packaging and leftovers each day. Do not reuse plastic bags as they could contaminate other foods.
- Wash whole fruits and vegetables under running tap water and blot dry with a paper towel before packing.

Choose Wisely:

- Perishable foods such as meats, cheese, eggs, yogurt, pasta or vegetable salads, sliced tomatoes, lettuce, opened canned fruit, and rice all require cold packing to keep them safe.
- Nonperishable foods such as whole fruits and vegetables, peanut butter, jelly, mustard, ketchup, pickles, chips, crackers, dried fruits and shelf stable fruit and pudding cups do not require cold packing.
- Hot foods such as soups or casseroles should be packed in an insulated container or thermos to keep them hot. Fill the thermos or container with boiling water and let stand a few minutes. Empty and immediately fill with the piping hot food, soup or beverage. Keep closed until lunchtime.

For ideas on bag lunch menus and more information on safe and nutritious lunches download the publication PM3026 What's for Lunch? It's in the Bag! from the ISU Extension and Outreach online store. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>

ISU Extension and Outreach Contact:
Renee Sweers, Human Sciences, Nutrition and Health Specialist
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
712-276-2157, rsweers@iastate.edu