

“Be Food Safe”

when packing lunches

Families get sick from meals made at home more often than you think. Follow the 4 simple steps of clean, separate, cook and chill to minimize the risk of food-borne illness when preparing and packing lunches.

Clean: wash hands and surfaces often; wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly

Bacteria can easily spread throughout the kitchen. Frequent and proper cleaning can prevent this from happening.

- Before and after preparing each type of food, wash hands, cutting boards, knives and countertops with hot, soapy water
- Make sure that food placed into the lunch bag has been properly cleaned. Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables under cool running water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten
- Store food inside the lunch bag in food-grade containers and/or wraps to minimize potential contamination

Lunch bag tips

- Make sure lunch bags/containers are maintained in a sanitary manner and in good repair
- Wash out the interior portion of the lunch bag that may come into contact with food, every day and rinse thoroughly with water to remove soap residue. The container should be allowed to thoroughly air dry. Follow the manufacturer’s directions
- Consider replacing the lunch bag if it is badly torn, exposes the insulation, and/or can no longer be properly cleaned
- Thoroughly wash re-useable drinking bottles every day



Separate : don't cross-contaminate

Cross-contamination is how harmful bacteria spread. Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices separate from foods that are cooked or ready-to-eat during purchase, transport and storage.

Lunch bag tips

- If packed lunches are stored in the fridge for later use, make sure they are stored above and well away from any raw meat, poultry and seafood



Cook: cook food to a safe internal temperature

Improper cooking of food could mean that harmful bacteria survive and make you sick. Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill the harmful bacteria. (See *Safe Cooking Temperatures* chart)

- Use a probe food thermometer to check the internal temperature of food. This is the only way to tell if the food has reached the proper final cooking temperature. You can't tell if food is cooked safely by how it looks

Lunch bag tips

- Keep cooked food that is to be held hot for lunch, at a temperature of 60°C (140°F) or higher. Use a properly insulated thermal container. Follow the manufacturer's directions
- Never allow food to sit at temperatures between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F)
- If leftovers are being reheated for lunch, make sure they are heated to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or higher. Bring soups to a full, rolling boil and stir during the reheating process



Chill: refrigerate promptly, cool food quickly

- Bacteria multiply fastest at the temperatures between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F), so chilling food properly is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of illness.
- Keep the fridge at 4°C (40°F) or below. Have an appliance thermometer in your fridge and check it often to make sure that it is at the correct temperature.
- Store perishable food (such as meats and dairy products) that require cold holding in the refrigerator or freezer as soon as you get home from the store
- Store leftovers quickly. Leftovers intended for lunches should be used within two days of having been originally prepared

Lunch bag tips

- Keep food out of the danger zone. Use ample ice packs to make sure food is kept cold. Make sure food being stored cold is maintained at or below 4°C (40°F)
- Keep sandwiches made ahead of time in the refrigerator until you are ready to pack the lunch
- Discard leftover perishable food that has remained in the lunch bag for more than two hours if it has not been stored at temperatures at or below 4°C (40°F) or at or above 60°C (140°F)

Symptoms of food-borne illness include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, headache and fever. People who think they are experiencing food-borne illness should seek medical attention.



For more information on food safety at home, contact

York Region Health Connection at

1-800-361-5653 TTY: 1-866-252-9933

or visit www.york.ca/foodsafety

