



Lunch box safety

This fact sheet provides advice to parents and caregivers on how to maintain food safety when packing children's school lunch boxes.

Each year, many thousands of Queenslanders suffer from illnesses associated with eating contaminated food, and children are more at risk of food poisoning and other infections than healthy adults. Food poisoning can be a serious health risk and further effects may include doctor's visits, medication costs, time off work for parents to care for their sick child and in most cases, time off school for the child.

KEEP IT COOL!

The most important thing to remember in keeping food safe during storage is to keep potentially hazardous food out of the 'temperature danger zone' of 5°C to 60°C. As schools generally do not provide students with access to heating devices, any potentially hazardous food in a school lunch box needs to be kept at a safe temperature of below 5°C.

Keeping in mind that school lunches usually sit for a few hours before being eaten, below are some simple tips to help ensure food is kept at a safe temperature until the time it will be consumed:

- use insulated lunch boxes or cooler bags
- keep a frozen drink or freezer brick inside the lunch box
- if preparing lunches the night before, keep it in the fridge until leaving for school
- encourage children to keep the lunch box in their schoolbag and to store it out of direct sunlight.

Any perishable food such as meat, poultry or egg sandwiches, should be thrown out if not eaten that day.

Alternatively, pack lunch options that do not need to be kept cool to stay safe, such as:

- sandwiches with fillings such as hard cheeses, pickles and some spreads (e.g. Vegemite or honey)
- canned meat or fish
- whole (uncut) fruit and vegetables.

Food safety tips

Parents and caregivers are reminded of a few simple food safety rules to prepare safe and healthy school lunches and avoid the growth and contamination of food poisoning bacteria:

- wash and thoroughly dry hands before handling food. Children should be encouraged to always wash their hands before eating.
- wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.
- keep food preparation areas clean and dry.
- keep lunch boxes, utensils and reusable water bottles clean and dry.

Further information on food safety is available on Queensland Health's website at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

