

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Diane Van, 301-344-4777
Diane.van@fsis.usda.gov

Partnership for Food Safety Education
Shelley Feist, 202-220-0651
sfeist@fightbac.org

Back to School Food Safety
Tips for Parents and Students

September 1, 2008 — It's time to pull out the backpacks and clean the lunch boxes as children head back-to-school this month. Packing safe lunches for school and for work is critically important. Since September is also National Food Safety Education Month®, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the non-profit Partnership for Food Safety Education are providing tips to help parents keep their children and themselves healthy.

Parents are reminded to follow the Be Food Safe basic practices of Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill to help reduce their family's risk of foodborne illness.

When packing lunches to take to school or the office, keep the following food safety tips in mind:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least twenty seconds before you prepare food or after playing outside, touching pets and using the bathroom. Sing "Happy Birthday" twice while washing hands to make sure you are washing long enough to send germs down the drain!
- Work on a clean surface. To prevent cross-contamination, always use a clean cutting board. Use one cutting board for fresh produce or bread and a separate one for meat, poultry and seafood.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Dry with a paper towel.
- If lunches are made at home the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until it's time to go. Make sure the refrigerator is 40° F or below at all times and use an appliance thermometer to check the temperature.
- Use an insulated lunch box, with an insulated bottle for hot foods or a frozen gel pack or a frozen juice box to keep perishable foods cold.
- Wash insulated lunch totes or boxes with hot soapy water after each use.

Smart students and parents never leave perishable foods out at room temperature for more than two hours. Toss any perishable food not eaten at lunchtime.

Free stuff for kids, teachers and parents

Parents and after-school providers are urged to help kids learn about food safety by getting them involved in fun, educational activities. Free work sheets, curriculum materials and a handwashing poster are available at www.fightbac.org.

Consumers with food safety questions can "Ask Karen," the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at AskKaren.gov. The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

* * *

About USDA FSIS

Preventing foodborne illness remains a top priority to USDA. The Food Safety and Inspection Service is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture responsible for ensuring that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. FSIS has conducted many public education programs to educate consumers on how to prevent foodborne illness and keep their families safe.

About the Partnership for Food Safety Education

The Partnership for Food Safety Education unites industry associations, professional societies in food science, nutrition and health, consumer groups and the United States Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency and from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration, to educate the public about safe food handling and preparation. The Partnership, a non-profit organization, is the creator and steward of the Fight BAC!® campaign, a food safety education program developed using scientifically based recommendations and resulting from an extensive consumer research process. Fight BAC!® materials are fully accessible online at www.fightbac.org and utilized by consumers, teachers, dietitians, public health officials and extension agents across the United States.

#