

USDA Handwashing and Lunch Packing Tips for Parents and Caregivers

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 05, 2019 — Summer is coming to an end and families across the country are trading in beach balls and roller blades for backpacks and notebooks. But back-to-school time is also followed by cold and flu season. Having the whole family follow some simple healthy behaviors can help them avoid all kinds of illnesses this time of year, including a topic we get lots of questions about: foodborne illness. Proper handwashing is the best thing you can do to stop the spread of germs and avoid getting your little ones sick.

“USDA research in collaboration with RTI International and NC State University has found that consumers are failing to properly wash their hands 97 percent of the time.” said Dr. Mindy Brashears, Deputy Under Secretary Food Safety. “Washing hands is one of the most effective ways to prevent illness, including foodborne illness.”

Be sure that everyone follows these steps:

1. **Wet** hands with clean, warm running water, turn off the tap, and apply soap.
2. **Lather** hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of hands, between your fingers, and under nails.
3. **Scrub** hands for at least 20 seconds.
4. **Rinse** hands well under clean, warm running water.
5. **Dry** hands using a clean towel or paper towel

Parents and caregivers who are tasked with preparing lunch for themselves and their children, should be a good role model by showing children how to properly wash their hands. Wash your hands and cooking surfaces before and after handling food. It is not only important to have clean hands, but also make sure lunch boxes and coolers are clean before packing.

Lunch Packing Tips

- If the lunch contains perishable food items like luncheon meats, eggs, cheese or yogurt, make sure to pack it with at least two cold sources, such as freezer packs. Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly so perishable food transported without a cold source won't stay safe long.
- Frozen juice boxes or water can also be used as freezer packs. Freeze these items overnight and use with at least one other freezer pack. By lunchtime, the liquids should be thawed and ready to drink.
- If packing a hot lunch, like soup, chili or stew, use an insulated container to keep it hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Tell children to keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food at 140°F or above.
- If packing a child's lunch the night before, parents should leave it in the refrigerator overnight. The meal will stay cold longer because everything will be refrigerator temperature when it is placed in the lunchbox.

Consumers can learn more about key food safety practices at [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov), by following [@USDAFoodSafety](https://twitter.com/USDAFoodSafety) on Twitter, and by liking [Facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov](https://www.facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov). Consumers with questions about food safety can call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or chat live with a food safety specialist at [AskKaren.gov](https://www.askkaren.gov), available from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday, in English or Spanish.

If you have questions about storage times for food or beverages, download USDA's FoodKeeper application for [Android](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.usda.fda.fdaapp) and [iOS](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/foodkeeper/id1488888888) devices.

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