

Is Your Child's Lunch Safe? New Survey Of Kids Delivers The Lunch Box Lowdown

(NAPSA)—The brown bag lunch you packed for your child may be healthy when it leaves your kitchen, but how safe is it when the lunch bell rings?

According to a new survey of kids conducted by the American Dietetic Association and the ConAgra Foods Foundation, a majority of kids say they bring their lunch to school at least once or twice a week, while more than half “brownbag it” up to five times a week. But each of these lunches could put your child at risk of foodborne illness if it's not packed or handled correctly. Parents want their children to eat a nutritious lunch, so they need to make sure those healthy sandwiches, salads and snacks are packed safely.

“The information that kids provide can be especially insightful because they haven't yet learned to be cautious,” says Jackie Newgent, registered dietitian and national spokesperson for the ADA/ConAgra Foods *Home Food Safety...It's in Your Hands*® program. “Although parents may have the best intentions when it comes to packing their child's lunch, our survey results show most parents are unaware of the home food safety hazards that can happen once the lunch is out of their hands and in their child's.”

Consider the Fridge Factor

Nearly every child reports that at least three to four hours pass from the time their lunch is packed at home until they eat it at school, while in some cases, as many as five to six hours can pass until the lunch bell rings. In turn, almost a quarter of kids admit to having felt sick after eating their lunch.

Yet what many of these kids (as well as their parents) may not know is that perishable foods should not remain unrefrigerated for longer than two hours—the



Lunches need to be packed with care, since they generally aren't refrigerated at school.

point at which harmful bacteria begin to multiply rapidly. In hot weather (90°F or above), this window is reduced to one hour. However, more than nine out of 10 kids say they keep their lunches on a classroom shelf or in their locker, backpack or desk until it's time to eat. In addition, most lunches do not include an ice pack to help keep perishable foods properly chilled.

“Since most kids don't have access to a refrigerator at school, including a frozen ice pack is an easy way to help prevent perishable foods from spoiling,” advises Newgent. “Another alternative is to use a frozen juice box, water bottle or single-serve plastic milk container—it works just as well and does double duty as a cold lunchtime drink.” Newgent also recommends using a well-insulated lunch bag or lunch box—instead of a paper or plastic bag—to help protect perishables.

Advise Against Unfair Trading

According to the survey, 84 percent of kids say they trade foods with their friends some or most of the time during lunch at school. But while you washed your hands before preparation—and included

an ice-pack to keep perishable foods safe—who knows if your child's friend's lunch was prepared with the same care?

While trading lunch items may be a popular thing to do among classmates and friends, it's also a potential health hazard. Remind kids not to trade food with friends since they don't know if their classmates' lunches were safely prepared or stored.

Follow a Clean Routine

More than half of kids confess they don't regularly wash their hands before eating lunch—which may be particularly hazardous for the two-thirds who have a morning recess prior to lunchtime.

“Washing your hands is one of the most basic steps everyone can take to help prevent foodborne illness—so it's very important that parents serve as role models for hand-washing behaviors,” says Newgent. “When parents lather up before eating or preparing food, they're teaching their kids a valuable lesson and setting a precedent for proper home food safety.”

More Home Food Safety Guidelines

The ADA/ConAgra Foods *Home Food Safety...It's in Your Hands*® program educates consumers that home food safety is a serious issue and provides solutions so Americans can easily and safely handle food in their own kitchens. This program complements government-sponsored food safety initiatives that speak to the leading critical food-handling violations by emphasizing the following four key messages: 1) Wash hands often; 2) Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate; 3) Cook to proper temperatures; 4) Refrigerate promptly below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

For more information, visit www.homefoodsafety.org.