

FOOD SAFETY IN CHILDCARE SETTINGS AND SCHOOLS

Foodborne illness can be prevented by following guidelines for handwashing, excluding ill foodservice workers, and for storing, handling, preparing, and cooking food and beverages in the childcare and school settings.

Handwashing

Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Alcohol-based hand rubs are not acceptable in the food service area. (See pgs 56-59 for more information on handwashing.)

Exclusion

- People should not prepare or serve food with the following:
 - vomiting and/or diarrhea or until 72 hours after the last episode of vomiting or diarrhea.
 - until treated with antibiotics or have had one or more negative stool tests (depends on specific bacteria).
 - skin lesions on exposed areas (face, hands, fingers) that cannot be covered. Wear finger cots or disposable gloves over covered sores on the fingers or hands.
 - when wearing fingernail polish.

Food and beverage storage, handling, preparation, and cooking guidelines

- Storage guidelines/rationale
 - **Store all potentially hazardous foods (eggs, milk or milk products, meat, poultry, fish, etc.) at 41° F or below. Childcare centers/schools that receive hot food entrees must hold potentially hazardous foods at 140° F and above and check food temperature with a clean, calibrated food thermometer before serving.** Bacteria may grow or produce toxins if food is kept at temperatures that are not hot or cold enough. These bacteria can cause illness if the food is eaten. Store lunches that contain potentially hazardous foods in the refrigerator. Use coolers with ice packs for keeping lunches cold on field trips.
 - **Store raw meat and poultry products on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator.** This will help to prevent the meat and poultry juices from dripping onto other foods.
 - **Keep food products away from cleaning products, medicine, and animal food.** Never refer to medicine as “candy” as this may encourage children to eat more medicine than they should. Some cleaning products can be mistaken for foods. For example, cleansers may look like powdered sugar and pine cleaners may look like apple juice. Cleaning products must be properly labeled.
- Preparation guidelines/rationale
 - **Prepare food in an approved preparation area. Preferably, one sink should be dedicated for food preparation and one for handwashing.** This area has equipment, surfaces, and utensils that are durable, easily cleaned, and safe for food preparation.
 - **Rinse fresh produce in a clean, sanitized sink before preparing.** This helps remove pesticides or trace amounts of soil and stool, which might contain bacteria or viruses that may be on the produce.

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- **Clean all surfaces before beginning food preparation.** Unclean surfaces can harbor bacteria and contribute to cross contamination. Cross contamination occurs when a contaminated product or its juices contacts other products and contaminates them.
- **Use an approved sanitizer for food contact surfaces. Test kits can be used to check the concentration.** High concentration of sanitizer can leave high residuals on the food contact surface, which can contaminate food, make people ill, and damage surfaces or equipment.
- **Label all sanitizer spray bottles. Check sanitizer solution daily using a test kit. Make a fresh solution if the concentration is below acceptable levels.** This will prevent accidental misuse of sanitizer spray bottles.
- **Always wash hands, cutting boards, utensils, and dishes between different foods. Use separate cutting boards for raw meats and produce.** Cross contamination occurs when a contaminated product or its juices, (e.g., raw meat or poultry) touches other products (e.g., fresh fruit, vegetable, cooked foods) and contaminates them.
- **Thaw foods properly: 1) on a tray on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator, 2) under continuously running cold (70° F or less) water in continuously draining sink, or 3) in the microwave, only if the food is cooked immediately afterwards. DO NOT leave food out on the kitchen counter to thaw.** Thawing food on a kitchen counter can allow bacteria to grow in the food.
- **DO NOT prepare infant formula in the handwashing sink area in the infant room.** Use water from kitchen prep sink to mix infant formula or use bottled water.
- Cooking guidelines/rationale
 - **Use a trained, certified food handler to prepare food.** Staff knowledgeable about safe food handling practices can prevent foodborne illnesses. Health departments may require certifications for commercial facilities.
 - **Rapidly heat potentially hazardous food. Take food temperatures to make sure food has reached appropriate temperature. Check with your local environmental health agency for appropriate temperatures.** Rapid cooking kills bacteria that may cause illness.
 - **Cook raw hamburger thoroughly until juices run clear. Use a food thermometer to achieve an internal temperature of 155° F per MN Food Code.** Raw or partially cooked ground beef can be contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7. Large quantities of hamburger may “look” cooked, but may contain “pockets” of partially cooked meat.
 - **Once cooked, take food temperatures to make sure food has reached appropriate temperature. Check with your local environmental health agency for appropriate temperatures.** Monitoring temperatures can ensure that all potentially hazardous foods have not been in the “danger zone” (41° - 140° F) too long, which allows for bacterial growth.
 - **DO NOT put cooked food in the same container or on the same unwashed container, platter, or cutting board that was used for uncooked meat or poultry.** The container or platter could contain harmful bacteria that could contaminate the cooked food.
 - **DO NOT serve unpasteurized milk, cheese, or apple juice.** These items may be the source of foodborne illnesses caused by pathogens such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157:H7, and *Listeria*.

Other Considerations

- **DO NOT let children serve or prepare food in the childcare setting. Cooking projects in the childcare and school settings should be treated as a science project. Alternatively, have the children make an individual-sized portion for themselves.** Children could contaminate food and make other children/staff ill if they handle food during these types of projects. Monitor the children's handwashing and supervise children so they do not eat the food.
- **If children bring food or treats to share, the food or treats must be purchased from a licensed store or bakery. DO NOT allow food/treats to be brought from home.** Children and parents may not understand food safety principles as well as staff at licensed food establishments. Licensed commercial kitchens are more controlled environments for preparation than private homes.
- **DO NOT wash bottles, nipples, or dishes in the handwashing sink area in the infant room.** Any items that need to be cleaned and/or sanitized must be sent to the kitchen.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.