

FEATURE – USDA FOOD SAFETY ADVICE FOR PACKING LUNCHES

INTRO: Keep food safety in mind when packing school lunches. The US Dept of Agriculture can help your kids avoid foodborne illness. USDA's Pat O'Leary tells how. (1:26)

WHEN PACKING LUNCHES THE NIGHT BEFORE OR THE MORNING OF THE SCHOOL DAY, KEEP IN MIND THAT TIME AND TEMPERATURE CAN WORK AGAINST FOOD SAFETY.

Donna Karlsons, USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline: And that's because harmful bacteria can grow on foods at room temperature, so it's important to prepare and store those lunches safely to avoid foodborne illness.

EXPERTS SAY TO BE FOODSAFE WITH FOUR EASYGUIDELINES: CLEAN, SEPARATE, COOK AND CHILL. CLEAN HANDS AND SURFACES; SEPARATE TO AVOID CROSS CONTAMINATION; COOK TO SAFE INTERNAL TEMPERATURES; AND KEEP FOODS CHILLED.

Karlsons: It's a good idea to put a freezer gel or a frozen drink box in the lunch carrier, to keep sandwiches cold until lunchtime. We recommend insulated lunch boxes that keep food cold or hot and are easy to clean. You also want to put some moist wipes or gel sanitizers in with lunch. They're great for washing hands, surfaces and utensils, and they're easy to pack in a lunch box or bag. If you pack hot foods, use insulated containers. Pour steaming water into an insulated container to heat it before filling it with hot food.

AND REMEMBER THE 2-HOUR RULE: AT ROOM TEMPERATURE, FOOD IS SAFE TO EAT FOR 2 HOURS. ANY LONGER, OR IF THERE IS ANY DOUBT – THROW IT OUT.

Karlsons: And if it's a hot day, cut that two hour rule in half to one hour.

FOR MORE FOOD SAFETY TIPS, VISIT ASKKAREN DOT GOV OR CALL THE USDA'S MEAT & POULTRY HOTLINE AT 1-888-MPHOTLINE. FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.