

Foodborne Illness

Food safety and sanitation are important aspects of providing healthy food for children. Improper food preparation, handling, or storage can quickly result in food being contaminated with germs that may lead to illness such as hepatitis A or diarrheal diseases if the contaminated food is eaten. Contact your local health department to obtain the local regulations and standards for food safety and sanitation and to ask about the availability of a food handler course in your area.

Understanding and following a few basic principles can help prevent food spoilage and transmission of infections. *To prevent foodborne infections:*

- Keep food at safe serving and storage temperatures at all times to prevent spoiling and the risk of transmitting disease. Food should be kept at 40 degrees F or colder or at 140 degrees F or warmer. The range between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F is considered the "danger zone" because within this range bacteria grow most easily. Leftovers, including hot foods such as soups or sauces, should be refrigerated immediately and should not be left to cool at room temperature. Using shallow pans or bowls will facilitate rapid cooling. Frozen foods should be thawed in the refrigerator, not on counter tops, or in the sink with cold water, not hot or warm water.
- Use only approved food preparation equipment, dishes, and utensils. Check local child care licensing regulations. Only use cutting boards that can be disinfected (made of nonporous materials such as glass, formica, or plastic), and use separate boards for ready-to-eat foods (including foods to be eaten raw) and for foods which are to be cooked, such as meats.
- Use proper handwashing techniques. Proper handwashing is important for everyone in a child-care setting, but is especially necessary for food handlers to prevent the spread of infections or contamination of the food.
- Don't handle food if you change diapers. In a large child care setting, food handlers should not change diapers and should avoid other types of contact that may contaminate their hands with infectious secretions. This may not be practical in a small child care setting in which the provider must also prepare the food. In this case, proper handwashing is essential.
- Don't prepare or serve food if you have diarrhea, unusually loose stools, or any other gastrointestinal symptoms of an illness, or if you have infected skin sores or injuries, or open cuts. Small, uninfected cuts may be covered with nonporous, latex gloves.
- Supervise meal and snack times to make sure children do not share plates, utensils, or food that is not individually wrapped.
- Eating utensils that are dropped on the floor should be washed with soap and water before using .
- Discard food that is dropped on the floor and remove leftovers from the eating area after each snack or meal.
- Clean, sanitize, and properly store food service equipment and supplies. Follow dishwashing techniques as specified in the "Protective Practices" section of this handbook. Use only utensils and dishes that have been washed in a dishwasher or, if washed by hand, with sanitizers and disinfectants approved for this use. Otherwise, use disposable, single-use articles that are discarded after each use.
- Clean and sanitize after each use table tops on which food is served.

- Only accept expressed breast milk that is fresh and properly labeled with the child's name. Expressed breast milk to be used during the current shift should accompany the child that day. Don't store breast milk at the facility overnight. Send any unused expressed breast milk home with the child that day. NEVER feed a child breast milk unless it is labeled with that child's name.
- Except for an individual child's lunch, only accept food that is commercially prepared to be brought into the child care setting. Numerous institutional outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness, including infectious hepatitis, have been linked to consumption of home-prepared foods. Food brought into the child care setting to celebrate birthdays, holidays, or other special occasions should be obtained from commercial sources approved and inspected by the local health authority.
- Each individual child's lunch brought from home should be clearly labeled with the child's name, the date, and the type of food it is. It should be stored at an appropriate temperature until it is eaten. Food brought from a child's home should not be fed to another child.
- Raw eggs can be contaminated with Salmonella. No foods containing raw eggs should be served, including homemade ice cream made with raw eggs.