



North Central District Health Department

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NCDHD Reminds Parents to Pack Camp Lunches Safely

As the school year comes to a close and summer camps prepare for some summertime fun, the North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) wants to remind parents to pack camp lunches safely. The warm weather provides the ideal environment for bacteria to grow. Packing lunches properly will prevent your child(ren) from contracting a food borne illness while at camp.

“Food brought from home can be kept safe if it is handled and prepared properly,” said Patrice Sulik, NCDHD Director of Health. “Perishable foods need to remain cold from the time they leave your refrigerator to the time it is eaten by your child. Packing ice packs with the food will help to maintain the proper food temperature.”

NCDHD Board member, Cathy Rebai of Vernon, said “It is also important to store lunch bags properly to prevent illness. Lunches should be kept in the refrigerator or a cooler, if possible. If neither of these options is available, lunches should be placed in a shady area.”

Part of planning a great summer experience for your child(ren) is making sure they are safe.

NCDHD and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offer some safe food handling recommendations to prevent food borne illness from bag lunches.

- **Begin With Safe Food** – Perishable foods, such as cooked meat and poultry, must be kept cold (below 45 ° Fahrenheit) or frozen. Prepackaged combos that contain luncheon meats along with crackers, cheese, and condiments also must be kept refrigerated.
- **Keep Everything Clean** – Wash your hands before you prepare or eat food. Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item. A solution of one teaspoon of bleach in one quart of water may be used to sanitize surfaces and utensils after they are washed and rinsed.
- **Don't Cross Contaminate** – Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for meat and poultry, or wash one cutting board thoroughly between cutting different food items.
- **Packing Lunches** – Pack just the amount of perishable food that can be eaten at lunch. It's fine to prepare the food the night before and store the packed lunch in the refrigerator. Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are best for keeping food cold, but metal or plastic lunch boxes or paper bags can also be used. If using paper lunch bags, create layers by double bagging to help insulate the food. An ice source should be packed with perishable food in any type of lunch bag or box.
- **Keeping Cold Lunches Cold** – Include a small frozen gel pack or frozen juice box in lunch bags to keep lunches cold. If there's a refrigerator available at school, have your child store perishable items there upon arrival.
- **Keeping Hot Lunches Hot** – Use an insulated container to keep hot foods hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot.

- **Microwave Cooking/Reheating** – When using the microwave oven to reheat lunches, cover food to hold in moisture and promote safe, even heating. Cook frozen convenience meals according to package instructions.

For further information contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854 or visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

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About NCDHD

The North Central District Health Department (NCDHD) serves the communities of Enfield, East Windsor, Ellington, Stafford, Suffield, Vernon, Windham, and Windsor Locks. NCDHD is a full-time public health department with a full-time staff funded by its member towns and an annual per capita grant from the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. NCDHD provides professional public health services in the areas of health education and disease prevention, environmental health and emergency preparedness. The mission of NCDHD is to prevent disease, injury, and disability by promoting and protecting the health and well-being of the public and our environment.

For more information about NCDHD visit www.ncdhd.org.