

Food Safety Tips for Kids

Bookbags and backpacks get quickly tossed aside and the munchies take over when kids burst through the door after school. If your child is home alone for an hour or two after school, how can you make sure their snacks are safe from foodborne bacteria and they are protected from dangers in the kitchen?

Many kids don't just open a bag of chips — some make cookies from scratch; others use a microwave to heat up instant noodles or soup. Sound safe? Not if the cookie maker tastes the raw homemade cookie dough because that could lead to Salmonella poisoning and sometimes hospitalization. And heating soup in the microwave isn't safe if the cook isn't tall enough to reach the microwave and spills hot soup on himself. That's a major cause of serious burns in children.

Kitchen Safety

Take some time for a "Food Safety Workshop" with your children. Walk them around the kitchen. Explain how to safely use the microwave and teach them some basic food safety tips. Check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service's (USDA/FSIS) website at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/food_safety_education/_kids_&_teens/index.asp. You will find a variety of games and puzzles that kids will enjoy.

Quiz: True or False

Before you let kids have the run of the kitchen, take this little true or false quiz together:

1. Put backpacks on the floor, not the counter.
2. Washing your hands with warm water and soap washes bacteria down the drain.
3. You need to wash fruits and vegetables under cold running water before eating.
4. Cooked foods should not be put on the same plate that held raw meat or poultry (unless the plate has been thoroughly washed.)
5. Lunch meat or deli meat does not need to be refrigerated until the package is opened.
6. Don't leave leftovers on the counter for more than 2 hours.
7. Always wash your hands after touching raw meat or poultry.
8. Eating homemade cookie dough is not safe because it may contain raw eggs.

(Answers: 1, 2, 3, 4, True. 5 - False. 6,7,8 - True.)

Microwave Safety

Reading and understanding directions is extremely important. Children should know how to read before being allowed to use the microwave. If they are old enough to use a microwave, follow these tips:

- Pierce hot dogs with a fork before putting them into the microwave oven to keep them from exploding. Reheat hot dogs until they are hot and steaming.
- Foods and liquids are heated unevenly in the microwave, so stir or rotate food midway through cooking. If you don't, you'll have cold spots where harmful bacteria can survive.
- Use only microwave-safe containers and lids when cooking or reheating foods in the microwave. Microwave-safe plastic wrap should be placed loosely over food so that steam can escape, and should not directly touch your food. The moist heat will help destroy harmful bacteria. Other materials safe to use for covering food in the microwave include wax paper, cooking bags, parchment paper and white microwave-safe paper towels.
- To prevent burns, carefully remove food from the microwave oven. Use potholders

and uncover foods away from your face so steam can escape.

- Do not use carry-out containers from restaurants, Styrofoam, or plastic containers such as margarine tubs not intended for microwave use. They can warp or melt, possibly causing harmful chemicals to get in the food.
- Do not use metal or aluminum foil containers in the microwave. They can get too hot and burn. Use only glass and other containers labeled "made for microwave use".
- Throw away leftovers (and any perishable food) that stays out longer than two hours — or one hour if it's over 90 °F. When in doubt, throw it out!

Science in the Kitchen

Why should you put food back in the refrigerator as soon as possible? Bacteria need time and the right environment — such as moisture and warmth to grow and multiply. Most foodborne illness-causing organisms grow quickly above 40 °F. Some bacteria can double their numbers every 20 minutes at temperatures above 40 °F. In a few hours, bacteria on food can cause an illness or form toxins that might not be fully destroyed by cooking.

Learning How to Fight Bac!®

Check out the Fight BAC!® website at <http://www.fightbac.org/content/view/19/39/>, a fun resource for the whole family. Post the Fight BAC!® messages on your refrigerator as a reminder to the whole family of these strategies to prevent foodborne illness.

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often.
- **Separate:** Separate raw meat, poultry and egg products from cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- **Cook:** Raw meat, poultry and egg products need to be cooked thoroughly. Teach children to use a food thermometer to ensure foods have reached a high enough temperature to kill any harmful bacteria that might be present. If reheating leftovers, heat to 165 °F.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly.

Minimum Internal Temperatures of Foods

Keep this chart where all family members will see it: These temperatures destroy foodborne bacteria, but it is fine to cook meat and poultry to higher temperatures, if you prefer.

Temperature	Food
145 °F	Fish steaks or fillets. All cuts of beef, lamb, pork and veal. For both safety and quality, allow meat to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
155 °F	Ground, mechanically tenderized or injected meats. Ground fish. Egg dishes.
165 °F	Poultry and wild game. Stuffing and casseroles.

For more information on food safety, request [HGIC 3607, Teaching Children about Food Safety](#), [HGIC 3495, Food Safety Mistakes You Do Not Want to Make](#), and [HGIC 3500, Basics of Safe Food Handling](#).

Sources:

1. FDA. *Food Code 2009*. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/FoodCode2009/ucm186451.htm>
2. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. May 2011. *USDA Revises Recommended Cooking Temperature for All Whole Cuts of Meat, Including Pork, to 145 °F*. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_052411_01/index.asp
3. USDA/FSIS (2004, Sep). *Home Alone? After School Snacks and Food Safety* USDA Quiz for Parents and Kids. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_090704_01/index.asp
4. USDA/FDA. *Fight BAC!* <http://www.fightbac.org>

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