

ADVERTISEMENT

Kids' lunch bags flunk food safety test

by Kerry Tomlinson, KATU Problem Solvers
Thursday, February 12th 2015

A

You may think you're doing the right thing packing your kid's lunch in an insulated lunch bag to

Search Site



But the KATU Problem Solvers put insulated bags to the test and the results may be a shock for parents.

LIVE Children's lunches before 7:00 am, but the lunches are not refrigerated for mo

59°

78°

77°

Can an insulated bag keep them safe?

We asked local moms, Jessica Martin-Weber and Carrie Saum, how long they thought an insulated bag without an ice pack would hold a safe temperature.

How long do you think the lunch bags keep food cold? We're talking about this [on our Facebook page](#).

"I would say an hour and a half," said Saum.

"I really want to believe it's longer," said Martin-Weber. "I really, really want to believe it's, like, four hours, please?"

Unfortunately, no.

Why didn't we get sick from out-of-temperature lunches when we were kids? Answers [here](#).

The Problem Solvers tested three different bags by three different manufacturers in a non-scientific study.

We prepared three turkey sandwiches---with meat from a refrigerator at 39 degrees--- and put them into the insulated bags with an apple, a packet of goldfish snacks, and a thermometer.

We opened the sacks one hour later. Not a single bag kept the lunch at a safe temperature, 40 degrees or below, for even one hour.

We started over again, with new sandwiches, this time, adding an ice pack.

We checked one hour later. Once again, no insulated bag with an ice pack held food at a safe temperature, 40 degrees or below.

Search Site



LIVE foods - like a turkey sandwich - **can on** 59° 78° 77°
sidered unsafe.

Saum and Martin-Weber don't need to do the math to know that their family's lunches are in the danger zone too long, if, for example, the lunches are prepared before 8:00 am and eaten after 11:00 am.

"Totally grossed out, so grossed out," said Saum.

The brand of sack may not make a difference. Good Housekeeping reviewed more than two dozen insulated lunch sacks, and found that **none kept food at a safe temperature for longer than two hours.**

Researchers in a **2011 study** found that only about 2% of preschool children's lunches with perishable food was in the safe temperature zone, even when parents used a sack with an ice pack.

"Food Lady" to the rescue

How can you save your child's lunch, and yours as well, if you take your lunch to work in an insulated sack

We turned to educator Jenny Rudolph with the **Oregon State University Extension Service**, who said she is sometimes called "The Food Lady."

She said you need to use at least two, even three, ice packs for sack lunches.

"You really need to keep it at that temperature (below 40 degrees), which is actually pretty hard to do, considering that the food is going to sit there at room temperature for probably four to five hours," said Rudolph.

She recommended parents freeze small or large plastic water bottles and put them in lunches, too. Freezing juice boxes can work as well. Meat and dairy items in lunches require the most

Search Site



"Microorganisms love to have a little protein," added Rudolph.

LIVE use nut or seed protein if you can't keep
snack bars have soy or whey protein th: 59° 78° 77°

Rudolph said that families can offer more protein at breakfast and at dinner to make up for less protein at lunch time, if that works for their children.

She suggested adding frozen items to the lunch bag, like packages of frozen edamame, which would give the child protein as well as contribute to keeping the temperature lower, and putting frozen berries into yogurt, if you decant bulk yogurt into single-serving containers, to keep it cooler.

You can also freeze sandwiches or other foods to put into lunch bags, if your child is willing to eat them after freezing, or if the food does not thaw all the way.

"The more cold items and the tighter packed it is, the longer it will stay cold," said Rudolph.

Leftovers may be a lunch's worst enemy

Dinner leftovers pose a special risk in lunches, said Rudolph, because the food has already spent time in the temperature danger zone.

"How long was it left out the night before before it got put in the refrigerator?" asked Rudolph, who added that hot food often does not cool in the refrigerator right away, and thus may spend even more time in the danger zone.

The time is cumulative, so leftovers would have even less time out of temperature in your lunch sack before it reaches a critical point.

Rudolph recommended that you do not allow dinner leftovers in lunches to be out of temperature at all.

"In theory, it should be below 40 degrees the whole time before your child eats it," said Rudolph.

You can look for foods at the grocery store that are not kept refrigerated, like fruits and vegetables. If the store does not keep them refrigerated, you do not need to keep them refrigerated, she said.

Rudolph suggests you test your own child's lunch, using a refrigerator-type thermometer, so you can see how long it stays at safe temperatures, below 40 degrees.

"With your kiddos, you don't want to take any sort of chance on food borne illness," said Rudolph.

Saum and Martin-Weber want to try the lunch temperature test with their families. They run a website called [Our Stable Table](#) and are interested in food issues. Plus, they want to try to keep their families safe.

"We might have had food poisoning once or twice. That changes how you look at everything!" said Martin-Weber.

Parental doubt

Some parents may have doubts about this information. We asked Rudolph for answers to some parent questions:

Parent question: *"Well, I've been doing this for years, and my kids haven't gotten sick. Why should I change now?"*

Rudolph: We get this question all the time in our programs whenever we discuss food safety. Food borne illness affects children more severely than healthy adults, and I think all parents want the best for their kids. It only takes one bout of food borne illness to change anyone's mind about the importance of food safety. However, many people confuse the symptoms of food borne illness with other ailments - like a "stomach flu". So, it is definitely under-reported and therefore parents may not know that those leftovers that stayed out for too long were to blame for their child's intestinal illness. [Here is a great site with more info of the symptoms of food borne illness.](#)

Parent question: *"My parents sent me to school with a paper bag and a bologna sandwich, and I never got sick. How can this be a real problem?"*

Rudolph: Over time some of the bacteria that cause food borne illness have actually become stronger and more prevalent in our environment. So, those raw eggs that grandma ate were

LIVE 59° 78° 77°
e contained Salmonella bacteria as the
ince system is also better today. So, we

makes us sick than our grandparents knew. So, this is a good opportunity for parents to become more aware of the issue and take some simple steps to improve sanitation in the kitchen. [More research to back this up from the CDC.](#)

More tips and resources from "The Food Lady"

- Try a lunch bag with built-in freezable gel in all surfaces of the bag, so that your lunch could be surrounded by cold gel.
- Clean out insulated lunch bags often, using the same tools and cleaners as you would on a kitchen counter. She does not recommend washing them in a washing machine.
- Wash hands before making your child's lunch, so you introduce fewer microbes to their food.
- Eat lunch provided by the school. She works with schools to help them provide nutritious lunches for kids.

[USDA Fact Sheet on Safe Bag Lunches](#)

[MyPlate website with loads of information and tips on healthy eating and food safety](#)

[OSU Extension healthy recipes website, Food Hero campaign](#)

MORE TO EXPLORE

[Police: Man tried to abduct girl, 6, from home but grandpa wasn't going to let that happen](#)

[Oregon doctor drowns in boating accident on Rogue River](#)

[Police find missing Hillsboro woman, 2-year-old son in Portland; mother runs from officers](#)

NT

59°

78°

77°

LIVE

...with This Underwear...

The Weekly Brief | Mack Weldon

Colorado Mom Adopted Two Children, Months Later She Learned Who They Really Are

PopularEverything

Top Cardiologist: This One Thing Will Properly Flush Out Your Bowels

Gundry MD Supplements

Sponsored Links by Taboola

ADVERTISEMENT

Loading ...