

Home Alone: After-School Snacking

Food Safety Tips From USDA

(NAPSA)—Chew on this: Most of the estimated 7 million kids in the U.S. who are home alone after school have a snack every day. That's why it's important to teach your children vital food and kitchen-safety facts that can prevent illness or injury.

Whether your child chooses a cold snack, a ready-to-eat snack, a do-it-yourself snack, or a hot snack, it's never too early to teach the importance of clean hands, utensils, and the basic food safety techniques.

You might want to consider devoting some free time, such as Saturday morning, to a training session. Show your children around the kitchen and explain to them how to safely use the microwave and teach them some basic food safety information.

Here are some things you should make sure young snackers remember:

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water before you make a snack. This will get rid of dangerous bacteria.
- Always use clean forks, knives, and spoons.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under cold running water before eating.
- Don't leave food sitting out on the counter for more than two hours. Put it back in the refrigerator or freezer.

Want a Hot Snack?

Check Out The Microwave

- Make sure your children can read before they use the microwave oven. Reading directions properly is important.
- Foods and liquids are heated unevenly, so stir or rotate food midway through microwaving. If you don't, you'll have cold spots where harmful bacteria can survive.



Burns can occur when children remove heated containers from the microwave and spill hot foods on themselves.

- Reheat hot dogs until they are hot and steaming. Pierce hot dogs with a fork before putting them into the microwave oven to keep them from exploding.
- Cover a dish of food for the microwave with a lid or plastic wrap; keep the wrap loose to let steam escape. The moist heat will help destroy harmful bacteria.
- To prevent burns, carefully remove food from the microwave oven. Use potholders and uncover foods away from your face so steam can escape.
- Teach your child to use a food thermometer. When reheating leftovers, be sure the temperature reaches 165° F.
- **DO NOT USE** plastic containers such as margarine tubs or other one-time use containers in the microwave. They can warp or melt, possibly causing harmful chemicals to get in the food.

For more information and to receive a free coloring book and a CD of games about food safety, call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline toll-free at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or visit www.fsis.usda.gov.