

Together We Can Build Food-Safe Schools!

Strategy Sheet

Strategies for Parents

Getting your children properly fed every day is a critical factor in their educational development. Equally important is ensuring that the food they eat is safe and won't cause them harm. Today's fast-paced lifestyle places many demands on parents, and you may rely on schools to provide your children with safe, nutritious meals. It's good to know the school nutrition staff follows stringent food safety standards. As a parent, you have the primary responsibility for your children's care and behavior. You can teach your children about food safety, and you are an important role model for using good food safety practices. You also can urge school administrators to make food-safe schools a priority.

Food-safe schools adopt a school-wide approach to food safety, and, with the help of partners in the school community, can create a culture of food safety. Food-safe schools address a broad range of topics beyond the scope of what may be required by legislation. This starts with building and supporting strong food safety policies and procedures, and continues with education and training. Partners can help achieve the ultimate goal of making food safety second nature to everyone in the school community, thus creating a culture of food safety.

Parents Are Essential to Creating a Culture of Food Safety

- You are the primary source of information for your children.
- You are in the best position to teach them the importance of food safety to prevent illness.
- You can be an advocate for food-safe schools.

Thinking About Food Safety

- Do your children properly wash their hands before eating meals and snacks?
- Are procedures in place to keep the food your children eat at school safe?

- Does your child have a food allergy or intolerance? Have you spoken with school nutrition staff about your child's needs and provided staff with required medical documentation?
- How can you help build food-safe schools?

Take Action!

- Encourage handwashing and model food-safe behaviors.
Let your children see you washing your hands properly before meals, before preparing food, and after using the bathroom—and teach them to do the same!
- Ask the school nutrition staff to share information about food safety.
Ask your child's school to provide safe food handling recommendations so you can use safe methods to prepare and pack food for school. You also can learn more about food safety by becoming a BAC! Fighter. www.fightbac.org/
- Learn the causes and symptoms of foodborne illness.
Watch for symptoms, which range from slight discomfort to more serious problems. Seek medical care when your child has diarrhea, fever, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and dehydration. Always notify the school of your child's stomach illness, particularly if a diagnosis of a foodborne illness has been made.
- Educate your school community about your child's special dietary needs.
If your child has dietary restrictions, perhaps due to a diagnosed food allergy, educate everyone in the school community. It is important that everyone – administrators, teachers, the school nutrition team, bus drivers, students, and other parents – is aware of your child's needs. ■