

Introduction

As a school nutrition director, you work very hard to serve healthy, nutritious meals to children through child nutrition programs. Millions of students participate in these programs in school cafeterias every day. Schools across the Nation are also finding creative ways to serve meals to meet the needs of their students and community, such as breakfast in the classroom, mid-morning nutrition breaks, after school snacks, breakfast on the bus, and supper at school. The safety of the food you serve is a top priority. You want foods served through child nutrition programs to contribute to students' learning and well-being; you don't want them to cause harm.

Millions of meals are served to students in schools across the country every year, which means that the potential for food safety incidents, such as a foodborne illness outbreak, may occur from time to time. When these incidents happen, there can be serious consequences. Children and staff who get sick may have to be out of school. Severe cases can result in death. And the negative publicity undermines the confidence of parents and students in child nutrition programs.

To promote food safety, the National School Lunch Act requires that schools have a food safety program. The food safety program must be based on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 clarified that the food safety program requirements based on HACCP principles must be applied to *any* location where food is stored, prepared, or served as part of school nutrition programs; not just the cafeteria.

The requirements in the National School Lunch Act provide you with an excellent foundation for food safety; however, assuring the safety of the food for the children you serve goes beyond requirements. By going beyond the requirements and addressing other important areas of food safety, you will build food-safe schools throughout your district. Food-safe schools have two main ingredients – first, they are built on comprehensive procedures, policies, and plans that address the science of food safety. Second, they address people's behavior to encourage the use of food safety procedures, policies, and plans. Food-safe schools take a school-wide approach to food safety, and, with the help of partners in the school community, create a culture of food safety.

The Action Guide specifically targets school nutrition directors. It has three parts. The checklist in Part 1 is for school nutrition directors to gauge the food safety efforts in every school throughout their district. The Action Sheets in Part 2 speak directly to school nutrition directors about steps they can take. Part 3 provides tips and tools for district directors to use when communicating with partners in the school community about creating a culture of food safety.

In the Action Guide you will find slightly different guidance for the temperature danger zone between the recommendations for consumers compared with guidance for school nutrition operators. For example, consumers would be advised the temperature danger zone is 40°F - 140°F while for retail foodservice operators the temperature danger zone is 41°F - 135°F. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have developed educational materials for consumers, such

as parents or students, which incorporate a margin of safety. Food safety guidance for the National School Lunch Program follows the FDA *Food Code*, a model that provides a scientifically sound technical basis for food safety guidance for retail and foodservice institutions such as schools. Remember, however, you should follow your State and local public health department code requirements if they are different.

While the intended audience of the Action Guide may be school nutrition directors, it can be used by anyone. It isn't restricted to the district level. The

tools can be applied within an individual school, or an entire State. Simply look at the Action Guide's tools from your perspective and apply them to your role within the school community.

The Action Guide will assist you in:

1. Reviewing your current food safety efforts.
2. Taking action to build food-safe schools by addressing important areas of food safety.
3. Communicating with the school community to create a culture of food safety.

