

THE FOOD-SAFE SCHOOLS

ACTION GUIDE

5 SIMPLE STEPS TO PROTECTING YOUR SCHOOL FROM FOODBORNE ILLNESS:

1. **Select** a food-safe school team leader and make sure that he or she has a copy of the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide and other resources available at www.FoodSafeSchools.org.
2. **Assemble** a food-safe school team, including representatives from key stakeholders—such as teachers, parents, and food and health services professionals.
3. **Identify** your school's current food safety policies and practices.
4. **Assess** strengths and weaknesses using the Action Guide's Needs Assessment and Planning Guide.
5. **Develop** and implement an action plan with tools and guidance from the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide and other resources on www.FoodSafeSchools.org.

You can find the complete Food-Safe Schools Action Guide and much more at www.FoodSafeSchools.org. THE one-stop resource for preventing foodborne illness. Visit the site to:

- * Learn how to assemble a Food-Safe School Team
- * Find out how to assess risk and plan improvements
- * Get tips, resources, information, and action steps
- * Find a curriculum to meet your needs
- * Learn to detect and respond to an outbreak
- * Search an extensive, online database
- * Find detailed recommendations for teachers, nurses, foodservice staff, families, and others
- * Explore topics from biosecurity to handwashing and more



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PROTECTING STUDENTS. PROTECTING SCHOOLS:

AN ADMINISTRATOR'S BRIEFING

What Every Administrator Needs to Know

- * PROTECT YOUR SCHOOL FROM FOODBORNE ILLNESS
- * IMPROVE STUDENT AND STAFF ATTENDANCE
- * LOWER SUBSTITUTE COSTS
- * ENHANCE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE IN YOUR SCHOOL
- * REDUCE LIABILITY



EVERY DAY, YOUR SCHOOL'S REPUTATION IS ON THE LINE. AND IT GOES FAR BEYOND YOUR TEACHERS' CREDENTIALS, TEAM'S RECORD, OR STUDENTS' TEST SCORES.

DO YOU KNOW HOW SAFE THEIR FOOD IS?

This Administrator's Briefing offers some quick strategies to help protect your students and staff—and your school—from the human and financial toll of foodborne illness. The recommendations reach well beyond the cafeteria to any place where food is served—from sporting events and potlucks to field trips—because wherever there's food, there's risk.

This briefing is worth reading now. Why? Because much is at risk. Outbreaks can threaten children's lives. Parents can panic. Schools and districts can be held financially liable.

Foodborne illness is entirely preventable, however. You can take steps today to prevent foodborne illness from occurring in your school. It's simple! This Briefing offers a first look at the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide, where an administrator can learn how easy it is to create and maintain a food-safe school. The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide is brought to you by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and its partners in the National Coalition for Food-Safe Schools. The Action Guide, available at www.FoodSafeSchools.org, can help you implement a comprehensive team approach to ensure that food safety measures are undertaken wherever food is served in the school environment. And it does it step-by-simple-step.

The bottom line is prevention. There are an estimated 76 million cases of foodborne illness each year in the U.S.¹, but just one in your school system is one too many.

¹ Mead, P.S. et al. Food-related illness and death in the United States. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 1999; 5(5). Available from: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol5no5/mead.htm.



"At a Wisconsin school in October 2000, an *E.coli* O157:H7 outbreak occurred that received much attention in the media. Reportedly, a child returned to school too early after having diarrhea and spread an illness to other students through the school food program. A self-serve food bar with unsupervised handing of uncovered food; lack of time for handwashing before eating; lack of handwashing facilities... a combination of things could have contributed to the foodborne outbreak."

—Elaine Brainerd, American Nurses Foundation

WHAT IS FOODBORNE ILLNESS?



Foodborne illness is caused by contaminated food and is frequently characterized by a combination of the following symptoms and signs: generally rapid onset nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or abdominal pain that can last for hours to a few days. Sometimes symptoms are so severe, hospitalization is necessary. Even worse, some foodborne illnesses can lead to long-term health effects or death. Few who have experienced them can forget their unpleasantness, and most will avoid the food or any locale linked to their onset.

- * Bacteria and viruses are the most common causes of foodborne illnesses, but illness may also be caused by toxins, parasites, physical contaminants, or chemicals.
- * Illness can occur by eating even a small portion of any unsafe food.
- * Depending on the pathogen involved, symptoms may appear within half an hour of eating a contaminated food or may not develop for up to 3 or more weeks.
- * Vaccines are not available for most pathogens that cause foodborne illness.

As a school administrator, you are the gateway to ensuring a food-safe school. The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide can help you:

- * Assess your school's Food safety strengths and weaknesses
- * Prioritize action steps for staff
- * Identify curricula that work best for your school
- * Provide tips and resources for taking action



KEEPING ALL FOOD SAFE

All food served in the school environment must be safe—not just food served in the cafeteria. Any time food is served, there's a risk of a foodborne illness outbreak. Think about all the places food is served at school:



SCHOOL FOODBORNE ILLNESS OUTBREAKS

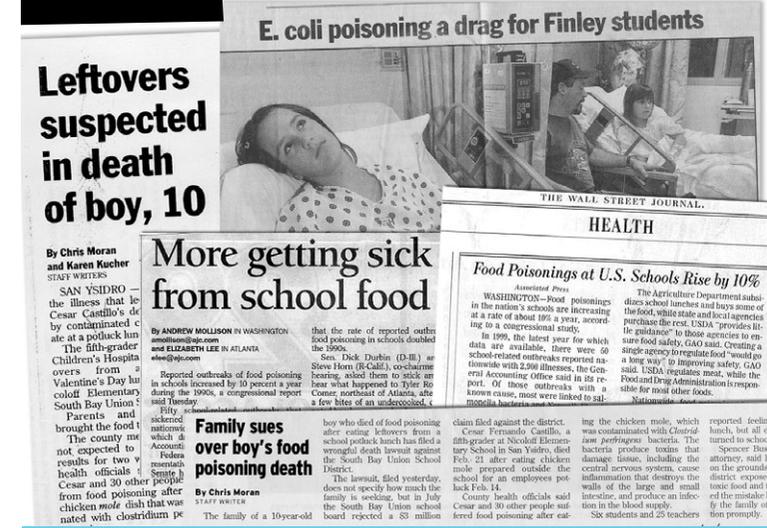


CDC estimates that in the United States every year there are approximately 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths from foodborne illness.³ From 1990 to 1999, 292 school-related outbreaks were reported to CDC. Some of these outbreaks came from school meals, some from other food sold or served at school, and some from food brought from home. In total, approximately 16,000 persons, mostly children, were affected.⁴ Because foodborne illness is underreported, these estimates may be only the “tip of the iceberg.”

It's vital that prevention measures be taken to make certain that all foods consumed in the school or at school-sponsored events are safe. Remember, a school can be held liable for a foodborne illness outbreak even if a staff member has not prepared or served the contaminated food.

² National School Boards Association. Experts advise schools on food safety issues. School Board News: Conference Daily. Alexandria, VA: March 26, 2001.
³ Mead, P.S. et al. Food-related illness and death in the United States. Emerging Infectious Diseases, 1999; 5(5). Available from: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol5no5/mead.htm.
⁴ General Accounting Office. Food Safety: Continued Vigilance Needed to Ensure Safety of School Meals. Statement of Lawrence J. Dyckman, Director, Natural Resources and Environment. Washington, DC: April 30, 2002. Available from: www.gao.gov/new.items/do2669t.pdf.

THE HUMAN AND FINANCIAL COST: ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S EXPERIENCE



In October 1998, 11 elementary students from Finley, Washington, became sick after eating ground beef contaminated with *E. coli* 0157:H7 bacteria in their school lunch tacos. One of the students spread the illness to a 2-year-old child, who subsequently developed renal failure, a prolonged and serious medical condition. The families filed a lawsuit against the district, and a jury awarded the students' families \$4.6 million, which was upheld on appeal.²

Says Robert Van Slyke, superintendent, Finley School District #53: *“You do not want to walk into the hospital as a superintendent and watch those kids suffer. ... Do the little bit that's necessary. ... It is too risky to ignore!”*