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John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A.  
Secretary

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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Tuesday, August 03, 2004

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***It's Back-to-School Time...***

**Tips for Packing Safe and Healthy School Lunches**

As parents open their children's new lunch boxes and prepare for another year of packing school lunches, the Pinellas County Health Department offers tips for getting the school year off to a good start with safe and healthy lunches.

- **Involve the kids.** Brainstorm with children to help them think of foods and snacks they'd like to eat. They're more likely to eat what's in their lunch box if they helped plan the meal. Depending on the child's age, it's a good idea to have the child help in preparing the lunch. If they've put time into packing lunch, they'll probably take time to eat it.
- **Keep things clean.** Make sure your hands, food preparation surfaces and utensils are clean. Wash fruit and vegetables before packing them into a child's lunch. Teach your children to wash their hands (using soap and rubbing hands together for at least 20 seconds) before they eat, and help them out by tossing in some moist towelettes to remind them to wash up before and after eating. Be sure to wash out the lunchbox each day and throw away any leftovers.
- **Keep hot foods hot, cold foods cold.** Hot foods, such as soup and chili, should be stored in an unbreakable, insulated thermos container. Before placing food in it, pre-heat the thermos with hot water. Use a freezer pack to help keep foods cold. You can also freeze a juice box to help keep cold foods cold in a lunchbox. The juice will be thawed by lunch time, but will still be cold. If you're not using single-serving juice packs, be sure to put milk or juice in a thermos to keep it cold until lunch time.
- **Refrigerate.** Bacteria grow more slowly on cold items. Refrigerate bread and canned items like tuna ahead of time to pre-chill them. If you make sandwiches or snacks the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until the morning. You can even pre-chill a thermos by keeping it in the refrigerator until you're ready to use it.
- **Practice pyramid power.** When planning school lunches, use the USDA food pyramid and plan on the lunch providing about 1/3 of your child's daily vitamin, mineral, and calorie requirements. A healthy lunch includes a variety of foods from different food groups.
- **Include some "brain food."** Think of ways to get protein into the lunch instead of just using carbohydrates. Add a cheese stick, a small cup of tuna salad with pickles, or sliced meat and veggies in a pita pocket. Provide a cup of peanut butter for dipping apple slices into or spreading on top of mini rice cakes.

(MORE)

(SAFE & HEALTHY LUNCHES – 1st ad)



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- **Use your imagination.** These days a school lunch can be much more than a peanut butter sandwich on white bread. Try varying the type of bread each day to make lunch more appealing and interesting. Bagels, rolls, pita pockets, English muffins, raisin bread, or flour tortillas are a healthy base for a nutritious school lunch. For something other than peanut butter, lean cuts of meat such as ham, roast beef, or turkey are favorites with kids.
- **Don't forget the treats.** There's no need for a child to feel "dessert-deprived." There are healthy options, such as graham crackers, trail mix, yogurt-covered raisins and animal crackers.
- **Consider the cafeteria.** The Pinellas County School District participates in the National School Lunch/School Breakfast Program. Nutritious meals are served every day in school cafeterias, and all meals served must meet patterns established by the USDA. Parents and children can look over the school menu together and make healthy food choices in advance.

With a little imagination and planning, parents can score an A+ in Lunchtime Basics! For more information about healthy school lunches, contact STEPS to a HealthierPinellas at 727-820-4113 or visit [www.pinellaswellness.com](http://www.pinellaswellness.com). Additional assistance and information about healthy lunches and the Food Pyramid can be found at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov), [www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov) and [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov). For information about food safety, visit [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov) and [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org).

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*