

# Brown bag lunches overheating and possibly unsafe

August 9 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

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In a new study published in *Pediatrics*, researchers reveal that more than 90 percent of the perishable food items found in the school lunches they tested had reached unsafe temperatures by the time they were to be eaten by children.

With the start of school quickly approaching, many parents are preparing to begin the daily ritual of making those famous brown bag lunches that they feel provide a healthy and safe meal for their [children](#) while at school. Unfortunately this new study shows that these lunches may not

be as healthy as some parents think. Even the use of ice packs was not enough to keep the foods from rising in temperature.

The study, led by Fawaz D. Almansour from the University of Texas at Austin, looked at lunches from 235 daycare children at nine different Texas locations on three random days between 9:30 and 11 a.m.

Out of a total of 705 lunches examined only 11.8 percent were kept refrigerated. Out of the lunches, 91 percent were sent in insulated plastic lunch bags but even these bags were not able to hold the temperature. The majority of the perishable [food items](#) reached near room temperature at an average of 63.7F. Out of a total 1361 perishable food items tested, only 22 items were in a safe temperature range below 39.2F.

Ice packs were not as much help as many parents think they are. A total of 61 perishable foods were packed in containers with ice packs and only five of these stayed in the proper temperature range.

Unfortunately, even those lunches stored in the [refrigerator](#) were not safe from [warm temperatures](#). A total of 458 perishable items were stored in the refrigerator in their insulated lunch bags, but only four items were within the safe temperature range. Researchers believe this has to do with how long items may have been left out at room temperature before being placed in the refrigerator or that the insulated bags were keeping the cooler temps out.

The researchers point out that the time that these temperatures were taken was at least 1.5 hours before the children were set to eat their lunch, meaning the temperatures are probably warmer when the children actually get to eat.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all

perishable foods kept at temperatures above 40F should be thrown away after two hours. This shows that the majority of lunches being sent to school with children are unsafe by the time they get to eat it.

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