

‘Raw and risky’ salads putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground

MONIQUE HORE, EDUCATION REPORTER, Herald Sun

January 21, 2017 7:00pm

Subscriber only

PARENTS are being warned of the hidden dangers lurking in lunchboxes with healthier foods creating a breeding ground for bacteria.

“Raw and risky” salads are putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground compared with the humble Vegemite sandwich.

But a frozen drink or ice block could prove the greatest weapon to ward off bacteria.

Research shows bacteria in a ham sandwich was 14 times higher after sitting for five hours in a shady spot on a 25C day — imitating conditions on a normal school day.

The nasties were only three times higher when a frozen drink was included.

The Food Safety Information Council’s Lydia Buchtman said a “stale Vegemite sandwich” didn’t promote much bacteria growth.

“The healthier foods may be great to put in your kids’ lunchbox, but bacteria also likes them and can grow quickly when they’re not kept cool enough,” she said.

“People forget salads can be a risk. If you’ve got a salad with lots of carbs — a rice salad, quinoa or pasta salad — that too can be a risk for food poisoning.

“It’s important that when people cook those grains that they are cooled in the fridge, not at room temperature, because bacteria can quickly grow and make you ill.”



"Raw and risky" salads are putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground. Picture: Jason Sammon

The council recommended children use plastic lunchboxes that are easily washed and come with drink bottles that can be filled and frozen.

It warned that while insulated lunchboxes kept food cool, they could be hard to clean.

Brighton mother Melanie Marino, a dietitian, uses frozen drinks to cool lunches for her children, William, 6, and Olivia, 8.

Their lunches include two fruits or vegetables, a wholegrain wrap or sandwich, a dairy product and a carbohydrate snack such as wholemeal pikelets.

"I also freeze a lot of things — grapes, strawberries, a banana, yoghurt or a plain milk — to keep the lunchbox cool," Ms Marino said.

"Lunchboxes can be challenging because parents can be overwhelmed walking into the supermarket with the choices and trying to work out food labels.

"I always advise to go for fruit and vegetables, and mix it up depending on what your child likes."

VicHealth's Dr Bruce Bolam urged parents to go the extra mile to cool their kids' lunches, rather than ditch the healthy foods.

"Food poisoning is always unpleasant, and can sometimes be severe, but in the long term it is far more important to have a balanced, nutritional diet," he said.

"That means lots of fruit, vegetables and whole foods.

"If it comes out of a tin or packet it is likely to give you less nutritional value than something you've prepared yourself or a wholefood."

monique.hore@news.com.au

[@moniquehore](#)

'Raw and risky' salads putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground

MONIQUE HORE, EDUCATION REPORTER, Herald Sun

January 21, 2017 7:00pm

Subscriber only

PARENTS are being warned of the hidden dangers lurking in lunchboxes with healthier foods creating a breeding ground for bacteria.

"Raw and risky" salads are putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground compared with the humble Vegemite sandwich.

But a frozen drink or ice block could prove the greatest weapon to ward off bacteria.

Research shows bacteria in a ham sandwich was 14 times higher after sitting for five hours in a shady spot on a 25C day — imitating conditions on a normal school day.

The nasties were only three times higher when a frozen drink was included.

The Food Safety Information Council's Lydia Buchtman said a "stale Vegemite sandwich" didn't promote much bacteria growth.

"The healthier foods may be great to put in your kids' lunchbox, but bacteria also likes them and can grow quickly when they're not kept cool enough," she said.

"People forget salads can be a risk. If you've got a salad with lots of carbs — a rice salad, quinoa or pasta salad — that too can be a risk for food poisoning.

"It's important that when people cook those grains that they are cooled in the fridge, not at room temperature, because bacteria can quickly grow and make you ill."



"Raw and risky" salads are putting kids at greater risk of food poisoning in the playground. Picture: Jason Sammon

The council recommended children use plastic lunchboxes that are easily washed and come with drink bottles that can be filled and frozen.

It warned that while insulated lunchboxes kept food cool, they could be hard to clean.

Brighton mother Melanie Marino, a dietitian, uses frozen drinks to cool lunches for her children, William, 6, and Olivia, 8.

Their lunches include two fruits or vegetables, a wholegrain wrap or sandwich, a dairy product and a carbohydrate snack such as wholemeal pikelets.

“I also freeze a lot of things — grapes, strawberries, a banana, yoghurt or a plain milk — to keep the lunchbox cool,” Ms Marino said.

“Lunchboxes can be challenging because parents can be overwhelmed walking into the supermarket with the choices and trying to work out food labels.

“I always advise to go for fruit and vegetables, and mix it up depending on what your child likes.”

VicHealth’s Dr Bruce Bolam urged parents to go the extra mile to cool their kids’ lunches, rather than ditch the healthy foods.

“Food poisoning is always unpleasant, and can sometimes be severe, but in the long term it is far more important to have a balanced, nutritional diet,” he said.

“That means lots of fruit, vegetables and whole foods.

“If it comes out of a tin or packet it is likely to give you less nutritional value than something you’ve prepared yourself or a wholefood.”

monique.hore@news.com.au

[@moniquehore](#)