

Food Safety for Young Children

Article written by Cami Wells, MS, RD (cam.wells@unl.edu) Extension Educator

Why should we be concerned about food safety when preparing meals for younger children? Children under the age of five are at high risk for food poisoning because their immune systems are still developing, so they cannot fight off infections as well as adults can. Additionally, young children produce less stomach acid that kills harmful bacteria, making it easier for them to get sick.

Food poisoning can be particularly dangerous for infants and young children because it often comes with diarrhea. Since children's bodies are small, they can quickly lose body fluids causing dehydration. Other symptoms of foodborne illness include nausea, vomiting, stomach pain and cramps, and fever and chills.

According to CDC, children younger than five have the highest rates of any age group for several types of food poisoning such as *E.Coli* 0157 and *Salmonella*. High risk foods for children include foods that are raw or undercooked, including: meat, poultry, and eggs; unpasteurized milk or juice, including cider; and any raw or undercooked seafood or oysters.

Holiday Bagel Bites

½ whole wheat mini bagel
2 teaspoons low-fat cream cheese
2 Tbsp. washed and finely chopped red and green fruit



1. Wash hands with soap and water.
Spread a thin layer of cream cheese on the bagel half.
2. Sprinkle fruit to resemble a holiday wreath. Makes 1 serving. Each serving contains 105 calories, 2g fat, 3g protein, 91mg sodium, 19g carbohydrate, 2g fiber, 2g added sugar, 3g protein.

This article was peer reviewed and updated in 2025. Check out the Food Fun for Young Children Newsletter at:
<https://go.unl.edu/food-fun>

4 Steps to Food Safety

In addition to hand washing and good hygiene, the safety of young children is closely linked to the food



safety behaviors of their parents and caregivers. Always remember the following four steps:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often.
- **Separate:** Separate raw meat and poultry from ready-to-eat foods.
- **Cook:** Cook food to the right temperature and use a food thermometer.
- **Chill:** Chill raw meat and poultry as well as cooked leftovers promptly (within 2 hours).

Sources:

- The Core Four Practices, Partnership for Food Safety Education:
<https://bit.ly/3cFIIDa>
- Food Safety Concerns for Children Under Five, Foodsafety.gov:
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/risk/children/index.html>