It’s hard to believe that August is almost here already! With the month of August comes the start of a new school year. For this reason, August has been appropriately designated as “Back to School Month.” As you start to think about buying school supplies and taking other steps to prepare for the start of a new school year, it is important to also think about food safety.

For families that pack their lunches, there are some important steps to follow to ensure the food packed in lunch boxes is safe for children to consume. In order for food to be safe in the lunch box, it must start out safe. As with any time you are preparing food, the first step is to wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least twenty seconds before preparing any food. Additionally, use hot water and soap to clean food preparation surfaces and utensils.

Next, it is important to think about the specific items you are packing. For example, if you are packing any fruits or vegetables, they must be rinsed with running water and blotted dry with a paper towel before being packed.
These are perishable items, so they must also be chilled to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Other perishable items (such as sandwiches) should also be chilled. You should pack two cold sources with perishable foods to keep them cool inside an insulated lunch tote. Two examples of these cold sources are a small frozen gel pack and a frozen juice box. Note that frozen gel packs are not recommended for day-long storage. In addition to keeping cold foods cold, it is also important to keep hot foods hot.

For more helpful food safety information from the Partnership for Food Safety Education, visit www.fightbac.org/kidsfoodsafety/school-lunches. If you have questions, please contact Clara Wicoff, Nutrition, Food and Health Extension Agent, at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or by calling 620-365-2242.