

Taking Action to Build Food-Safe Schools

Action Sheet

Food Defense

Food defense means protecting food from *intentional contamination* by biological, chemical, physical, or radiological agents that can cause harm or death. Schools may be a target for an attack on their food supply for specific reasons: Children are a vulnerable population; harming children who are assumed to be safe at school would have a major emotional impact on the community and beyond; schools provide very large numbers of servings per day; schools dispense very large batches of a single food on any given day; and activities such as transporting prepared foods from a central kitchen to a school site increase the risk of intentional contamination.

Also, food can be at risk of intentional contamination during handling at a school – from receiving through storing, preparing, and serving. Intentional acts are hard to predict and require an immediate and thorough response.

Food defense involves having measures in place to reduce the chances of someone intentionally contaminating the food in your school nutrition operation and to prepare for a quick response if an emergency does occur.

Food-Safe Schools Action Steps and Resources

1. Develop and implement a written food defense plan for each school within your district.
 - The USDA FNS offers a practical workbook tool, *Creating Your School Food Defense Plan*, that walks you through the process of developing a food defense plan.
www.fns.usda.gov/food-safety/food-safety-resources#Defense
2. Train all school nutrition staff in your district on food defense.
 - The FDA created a number of resources to raise awareness about food defense in the foodservice industry and assist foodservice managers in their food defense training and exercise programs. These resources can be accessed online at www.fda.gov/Food/FoodDefense/ToolsEducationalMaterials/default.htm and include the:
 - ALERT initiative
 - Employees FIRST initiative
 - Food Related Emergency Exercise Bundle (FREE-B)
3. Test your district's readiness to respond to a food defense incident by holding drills or exercises.
 - *Defending Food in Schools – a Tabletop Exercise Action Management Toolkit* (DFNS TEAM Toolkit), is a turnkey resource created by the USDA FNS that provides all the background and materials needed to help a school district conduct a food defense tabletop exercise involving contamination of food in the National School Lunch Program. To learn more about this exercise, contact the NFSMI Training Team at training@nfsmi.org ■

Food defense and food safety are similar—both focus on preventing the contamination of food. But you may need some different or additional actions to prevent the **intentional** contamination of food.