

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE ON FOOD IN SCHOOLS

This guidance document provides recommendations to reduce the risk of infection while maximizing student and staff health, and ensuring continued delivery of food-related components of the Ontario curriculum. Below are guidelines to consider as schools plan for re-opening during the COVID-19 pandemic.

STAFF AND STUDENT EATING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

- Designated areas should be assigned for eating lunches and snacks (e.g. classrooms, staff rooms).
- Select student eating locations that maintain cohorts and maximize physical distance as much as possible. Remove all furniture not in use to maximize space, movement and to adhere to physical distancing.
- Staff rooms should ensure physical distancing of 2 metres/6 feet space for seating. In staff rooms, consider walkways and ensure adequate spacing during walking. Ensure appropriate signage and use of floor markers to direct flow of traffic, including entrances and exits to staffing area.
- Staff and students must be seated while eating.
- Once seated, face coverings can be removed to eat food. Return face coverings if there is a need to stand or leave eating area.
- Staff and students should perform hand-washing before and after eating. Ensure access to handwashing using soap and paper towels, or provide liquid hand-sanitizer with 60% alcohol content.
- Eating surfaces (table tops) should be cleaned and sanitized before and after eating food.
- Student use of microwaves and multi-use appliances, utensils, etc. must be avoided.
- There should be a cleaning and sanitation plan for appliances, shared and common surfaces, utensils, handles, dishwasher, etc. used by staff.
- Allow enough eating time for students and staff to feel relaxed and enjoy food. A minimum of 25 minutes is recommended.
- Limit distractions such as screens, devices, etc.
- Staff or students who leave for lunch, should follow appropriate hand-hygiene protocols upon return.
- Ensure plans are in place for managing food waste including daily cleaning and sanitation of commonly used bins/containers.

ACTIVITIES TO AVOID

Non-instructional activities that involve students in preparing or serving of food cannot occur.

Providing food to students and/or staff as self-serve or communal sharing is also not permitted at this time. Examples include:

- Sharing food to celebrate occasions.
- Accessing food from a common container/tub for a treat or reward in classrooms.
- Re-purposing or re-distributing food prepared during instructional time.
- Drinking from mouthpiece of water-fountains. Re-filling water bottles from fountains, taps or filling stations that are cleaned and sanitized regularly is preferred.

INSTRUCTIONAL-BASED FOOD USE (e.g. hospitality programs, curriculum-based activities like planting seeds, cultural aspects of food, etc.)

Students and staff involved in instructional-based learning involving food handling and/or preparation must:

- Practice regular safe food handling and sanitation practices as required by [the Ontario Food Premise Regulations](#).
- Perform hand-hygiene before and after food handling, including handling crops or soil.
- Wear a mask or face covering at all times.
- For courses requiring food prep:
 - No sharing of food is permitted. Students may consume only the food they individually prepared.
 - Students must be seated when tasting or consuming food.
 - Leftover food cannot be re-purposed or redistributed.
- Tasting of food grown for instructional-based purposes should not be permitted at this time.

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THIRD-PARTY FOOD SERVICES (e.g. cafeterias, student nutrition programs, lunch programs, before and after school programs)

- Provincial guidance suggests that third party food services be delivered in a way that allows any student who wishes to participate the ability to do so. School boards should implement strategies for allowing continued access to food services to ensure food access for all those in need.
- Food in these programs should be made available in a grab and go format.
- All surfaces, bins and containers for food should be disinfected with 200ppm of quaternary ammonium compound solution prior to and after each use.

Food offered to students in these programs should minimize risk of infection and food-borne illness, as well as promote good nutrition.

- Staff or volunteers handling and/or preparing food must meet the requirements of the [Ontario Food Premise Regulations](#). Find more details about [food safety in schools](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises](#).
- Foods served and/or sold in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines: [Ontario School Nutrition Standards](#) or [Ontario Student Nutrition Program Guidelines](#), or [Nutrition Guidance for Child Care Settings](#).

Healthy Grab and Go Food Ideas for Families and Staff

Some ideas include:

- Whole, unpeeled fruits like bananas, apples, oranges, peaches, pears
- Individually packaged vegetables, fruit cups (packed in water), unsweetened applesauce cups
- Granola or cereal bars without chocolate chips or marshmallows that are not dipped in chocolate/sweet toppings
- Unsweetened, ready-to-eat cold cereals in individual packages, with whole grain, whole wheat, or bran as the first ingredient
- Individually packaged muffins, biscuits, crackers, breadsticks, bagels, popcorn, tortilla chips, brown rice cakes, pitas, English muffins, and other grain products with whole grain or whole wheat as the first ingredient and little or no added sugar or sodium (salt)
- Individual packages of sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, nut-free butter (in accordance with your school's anaphylaxis policy)
- Individual packages of roasted chickpeas or beans
- Individual containers of low-mercury, boneless fish such as light tuna or salmon

If refrigeration is available:

- Single-serve plain milk (1%, 2% or 3.25%), fortified soy beverages (unsweetened)
- Plain or flavoured yogurt cups (dairy or soy), kefir in cups, yogurt tubes or drinks, yogurt parfaits
- Individually packaged non-processed cheese slices/strings, boiled eggs, hummus
- Individually packaged sandwiches, subs, salads, wraps, etc.

Please note:

- Foods prepared and packaged off-site for individual use must be from an inspected facility. Contact [Health Connection](#) to consult with your local public health inspector.
- Some foods are not suitable for children under the age of 4 including:
 - Whole fruits with a hard texture or a pit
 - Whole baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, grapes
 - Fibrous fruits and vegetables with a stringy texture
 - Whole seeds larger than sesame seeds
 - Popcorn

Visit www.smdhu.org for guidance on packing [safe and healthy lunches for school](#).

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