

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE: FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Revised date: September 23, 2021

This guidance document provides recommendations to reduce the risk of COVID-19 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.

EATING TIMES AND LOCATIONS (INDOORS AND OUTDOORS)

- Designated areas should be assigned for eating (e.g., cafeterias, classrooms, staff rooms, seated outdoor areas).
- Staff and students must be seated while eating.
- Plan eating times and locations that limit the number of staff, students, and cohorts to allow as much physical distancing as possible (e.g., stagger eating times, eat outdoors when feasible, etc.).
- Consider walkways and ensure adequate spacing during walking. Ensure appropriate signage and use of floor markers to direct flow of traffic.
- Maximize physical distancing within cohorts as much as possible. Capacity limits should be in place to ensure 2 metres distancing between cohorts and as much distancing as possible within cohorts.
- Maximize space and movement by removing any unused furniture or structures.
- When eating indoors, masks and/or face-coverings should only be removed once seated. Return face coverings if there is a need to stand or leave the eating area.
- Indoor staff eating areas must allow staff to maintain at least 2 metres physical distance when masks are removed to consume food or drink.
- Select locations and times that allow individuals to follow good healthy eating practices, including:
 - allowing enough eating time for students and staff to feel relaxed, be aware of the food that is being consumed without rushing, and to enjoy their food. A minimum of 25 minutes is recommended.
 - limiting distractions from screens, and
 - minimizing access to less healthy food options.

CLEANING AND SANITATION REQUIREMENTS (INDOORS AND OUTDOORS)

- Staff and students should perform handwashing before and after eating. Ensure there is access to handwashing stations equipped with running water, soap and paper towel at all eating locations. If handwashing stations are not possible, provide liquid hand-sanitizer with 60% alcohol content in all eating locations.
- Staff or students who leave for lunch, should follow appropriate hand-hygiene upon return.
- Common eating surfaces (tabletops, counters, chairs or benches, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized before and after eating.
- There should be a cleaning and sanitation plan for appliances, shared and common high touch surfaces, utensils, handles, dishwasher, etc.
- Ensure plans are in place for managing food waste including but not limited to; daily cleaning and sanitation of commonly used bins, containers, trays.

AREAS WHERE FOOD WILL BE SERVED

- Should be cleaned and disinfected twice daily, or as needed to maintain it in a clean and sanitary state.
- Ensure physical distancing is maintained as much as possible by any staff, students or volunteers accessing the area.
- Provide access to handwashing stations that are equipped with soap, running water and paper towels.
- If needed adjust entry and exit areas to ensure physical distancing is maintained.
- Monitor line-ups and waiting areas to ensure physical distancing is maintained.
- Minimize hand contact by using utensils and serving on trays, especially when handling pre-cut or ready-to-eat foods.
- No eating of food should occur until seated in designated areas.

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WHEN HANDLING FOOD

Anybody that is handling or serving food, including but not limited to students, staff, and visitors must:

- [Wash hands with soap and warm water](#) for at least 15 seconds before and after handling food and food packaging. [Use approved alcohol-based hand-sanitizer](#) with 60% alcohol only if soap and water is unavailable.
- Wear a mask or face covering that covers their nose, mouth, and chin at all times (indoors and outdoors). Eye protection must be worn when serving to an individual who is not wearing a mask.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in clean, running water.
- Cook food to recommended internal temperatures.
- Avoid cross-contamination of raw and ready-to-eat or cooked foods.
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces that come into contact with food.

Students and staff involved in **instructional-based learning** involving food handling and/or preparation must also follow [the Ontario Food Premises Regulation](#).

THIRD-PARTY FOOD SERVICES (E.G. CAFETERIAS, STUDENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS, LUNCH PROGRAMS, BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS)

FOOD SAFETY

- Staff or volunteers handling and/or preparing food must meet the requirements of the [Ontario Food Premises Regulation](#). Find more details about [food safety in schools](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises](#).
- 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.

NUTRITION

Foods served and/or sold in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines outlined below:

Food Premise	Nutrition Standard
Student Nutrition Programs (lunch & snack program)	Ontario Student Nutrition Program Guidelines
Before and After School Programs	Nutrition Guidance for Child Care Settings
All other venues, events, or programs where food is served or sold (e.g., cafeterias, vending, sport events, lunch programs, fundraisers involving food, etc.).	Ontario School Nutrition Standards

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

ACTIVITIES THAT ARE DISCOURAGED

Providing food to students and/or staff as self-serve or communal sharing is discouraged 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.
- Limit distractions such as screens, devices, etc.
- Drinking from mouthpiece of water-fountains. Re-filling water bottles from fountains, taps or filling stations that are cleaned and sanitized regularly is preferred.