

# FAQs: Student Nutrition Program Planning

## COVID and Food Safety

### Hand hygiene:

**Q: The Ministry of Education indicates that "staff and students will perform proper hand hygiene before and after eating". Can a hand sanitizer be used, or is hand washing required before and after eating food?**

**Answer:**

- If available, hands should be washed with warm water and soap for 20 seconds. Alcohol based hand sanitizer which contains 70-90% alcohol may be used before and after eating if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Proper hand hygiene refers to either hand washing or using hand sanitizer.
- The rule of thumb is to wash your hands before and after eating food if they are visibly dirty, because the hand sanitizer will not be as effective on areas with obvious soil.
- Food handlers must wash their hands with soap and water.

### Preparing food:

**Q: Should the food be pre-portioned into individual servings in a food preparation area before being transported to the classroom?**

**Answer:**

- All food handling, which includes preparation and pre-portioning is to occur in rooms approved by the local public health inspector. This can include the pre-portioning of foods, where feasible, in advance of being transported to the classroom.
- Buffet-style food or drink service, where students are able to select from unpackaged or prepared food (e.g. loose carrots or passing around a tray to serve yourself) is currently not permitted.

**Q: Can a hand sanitizer be used, or is hand washing required before preparing food?**

**Answer:**

- Per the Ontario Food Premises Regulation (OFPR), hands must be washed with soap and water as often as necessary to prevent the contamination of food, utensils and equipment.
- Hand washing with soap and water is the standard when preparing food as is outlined in the OFPR. When preparing food for others, your hands should be as clean as possible to avoid contaminating another person's food.
- Students may use hand sanitizer before and after they eat if a sink is not available, as long as their hands are not soiled.
- There is a distinction between requirements for those preparing food and recommendations for those eating food.

**Q: If the schools have appropriate food preparation facilities and personnel, can they continue to wash and portion their own fresh vegetable and fruit, etc., as they did before COVID?**

**Answer:**

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- Yes, the OFPR and its requirements respecting food safety, utensils, equipment and food handlers remain unchanged.

## Transporting food:

**Q: Can SNPs continue to use bins to transport food to the classroom for serving? Are there better options which provide more food safety protection?**

### Answer:

- Bins may continue to be used, provided all food is protected from contamination (e.g. plastic wrap, containers with covers, prepackaged foods, etc.).

**Q: Is a cover to the container/bin/tray required? Would plastic wrap or tin foil be suitable?**

### Answer:

- Food must be protected from contamination. If exposed/unwrapped food is present, a cover would be required. Food grade plastic wrap, or foil is suitable, where necessary.
- If the food inside the bin is already wrapped, then a cover wouldn't be required to protect from contamination.

**Q: If shelf-stable food is left out over night or over the week, is a cover required?**

### Answer:

- Shelf-stable food can be left out at room temperature, provided it is protected by a cover or wrapping.

**Q: The Ministry of Education indicates that "All surfaces, bins and containers for food must be disinfected prior to and after each use". How does this apply to shelf stable food that is left in a bin over a period of time, for example, a week?**

### Answer:

- Under the Food Premises Regulation, equipment, utensils and multi-use articles must be cleaned and sanitized through use of a 2/3 Compartment Sink or a mechanical dishwasher\*. This would apply when visibly dirty or after every use.
- For example, if apples are left in a tray/bin in a hall or classroom where many people can touch the bin/tray over a period of a day or week, the exterior surface should be cleaned and sanitized every day.
- Containers must be cleaned and sanitized before they are re-stocked with new food items.

\* Local Public Health Units determine the requirements regarding program equipment and infrastructure (for example, number of sinks) based on information about the food served in the program, how food is prepared, and other relevant conditions.

## Serving food/operating an SNP:

**Q: What should be used to take food out from a serving tray/bin?**

**Q: Is a washed hand or gloved hand acceptable?**

### Answer:

- Hand contact should be minimized where possible by using utensils, especially when handling ready-to-eat foods.

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- Before a teacher, for example, passes the food out with his/her hand, he/she should wash his/her hands first or use hand sanitizer.
- Gloves are not required for preparing or serving food. If a person chooses to wear gloves, his/her hands should be washed or use hand sanitizer before putting the gloves on and gloves need to be changed between tasks that would contaminate them.
- If using gloves, follow the best practices below
  - Hands should be washed and/or sanitized between changes.
  - Remove gloves when changing tasks.
  - When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time.
- Before using a serving utensil, hands should be washed.
- Teachers may also choose to use a barrier instead of a utensil (e.g. paper towel), to hand food out to students (e.g. apples). Hands must be washed or sanitized prior.

**Q: If a serving utensil is used, which of the following would be most acceptable:**

**Answer:**

- Buffet style/self-service of food or beverage is currently not permitted.
- Only one person should touch the utensil and serve to others. Multiple individuals should not be touching serving utensil even if they are using a paper towel or a glove.
- The most ideal approach would be for each person to perform proper hand hygiene and then serve themselves
- Prepackaged food or drink, or whole fruit (i.e. unpeeled) do not require a serving utensil

**Q: Can a teacher portion food items such as, crackers or baby carrots, from a larger bag /box with washed or gloved hands onto each student's paper plate?**

**Answer:**

- No, all foods should be prepared and portioned by designated food handlers in designated food preparation areas, where there is proper equipment such as handwashing sinks and dishwashing sinks.

**Q: Do whole fruit (e.g. apple, banana or clementine), or grain products (e.g., muffin or crackers), need to be individually wrapped or can they be served without being pre-wrapped?**

**Answer:**

- Whole fruits that are not peeled, such as apples, pears etc. should be washed under cold running water. Individual wrapping paper is not required as long as the tray or bin is covered during transportation and awaiting service. Grain products must be individually wrapped by designated food handlers.

**Q: If a snack/meal consists of 2 or 3 food items, is it recommended that the items are put together in one container (e.g., paper or plastic bag) for each student, or could each item be available for students to take from its own bin? For example, if the meal includes a granola bar, a carton of milk and a banana, should these be packaged together into one bag and put into a bin OR could there be a bin for each food item which students take from?**

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**Answer:**

- Yes, either option would be fine.
- Trays over bins are preferred, if the foods/drinks are not packaged together.
- The bin or tray is being used to transport the items. The key is to make sure that hands and surfaces are clean.

**COVID-19 protocols:**

**Q: Are people operating an SNP required to:**

**Wear a new mask while preparing food?**

**Answer:**

- Masks are not required from a food safety perspective; however, **masks must be worn** if there is more than one food handler in the food preparation area. It is a requirement of the Ministry of Education not necessarily for food preparation. You're wearing it in case you have close contact with someone to prevent your germs from getting to others. If a person touches his/her mask while preparing food, hands need to be washed again.
- In general, a mask should be changed when moist or dirty. SNPs will need to follow mask or face covering workplace requirements of the relevant school board.

**Q: If a mask is required, is a face covering acceptable or does it have to be a proper mask?**

**Answer:**

- In general, a mask or face covering is acceptable. However, SNPs will need to follow the mask or face covering workplace requirements of the relevant school board.

**Q: Should full PPE be worn while working with food?**

**Answer:**

- In general, this would not be required. Workplace requirements may apply.

**Q: Where and how should people operating an SNP discard the mask when ready to leave the SNP?**

**Answer:**

- Masks can be discarded in any lined garbage bin, once removed, wash or use hand sanitizer on your hands.

**Q: Are there specific COVID-19 protocols that are new for SNP operators to practice? e.g.:**

**Answer:**

Follow this link for guidance.

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019\\_food\\_premise\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_food_premise_guidance.pdf)

**Q: Is there a limit to the number of people in food preparation space?**

**Answer:**

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- Limited to the number of persons who can practice physical distancing of 2 metres/6 feet. If more than one food handler in the food preparation area, masking is required
- Even with masks, need to maintain physical distancing
- Need two metres square (four squared metres) per person in the food preparation area – could use this as a rule of thumb to determine how many volunteers could work in food prep area at once
- The size of the space would indicate how many people could be in the space. Figuring out the right space is key.

### **Q: What is the process for accepting food deliveries from suppliers?**

#### **Answer:**

- Suppliers need to ensure their delivery drivers are screened for COVID-19 symptoms and excused from work when not feeling well.
- Physical distancing should be maintained.
- Same when receiving mail, no need to wipe things down upon receipt. Wear your mask and maintain distance.
- Refrigerated and frozen foods must be moved to proper coolers/freezers promptly.

### **Q: Should I be staying home if I feel symptoms?**

#### **Answer:**

- Should self-screen prior to their shift for COVID-19 symptoms. Must follow any additional health screening procedures at the school.
- Stay home if you have respiratory or enteric symptoms

### **Q: Do people operating an SNP need to be tested for COVID-19 prior to entering food preparation area? And if yes, are they required to show the negative results?**

#### **Answer:**

- No, testing is not required to enter the food preparation area for SNPs.
- Main keys are to stay 2 metres away from people, when for example, dropping off and picking up bin/tray, practice hand hygiene, masking and not come to work when sick
- Remind about the importance of reporting illness to their supervisor/manager.
- If become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 while at work, they should go home right away and self-isolate.
- Instruct to call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, a health care provider, or an Assessment Centre to get tested.
- Should report to school coordinator and/or principal prior to returning to the SNP.
- In general, can return 14 days after their symptoms began if they had COVID-19. Public will consult and provide direction to all those who have tested positive for Covid 19.
- For other illnesses, or if tested negative for COVID-19, they should not attend work until they are symptom-free for at least 24 hours for respiratory symptoms. For bowel related symptoms, they should not return until symptom-free for at least 48 hours.

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### General food safety:

#### Answer:

**Q: How long can an unpeeled fruit (e.g., apple, banana, or clementine) sit out unrefrigerated?**

#### Answer:

- There is no refrigeration requirement for non-hazardous food (i.e. unpeeled fruit)
- Whole fruit can sit out as long as it doesn't spoil, however it must be protected from contamination.

**Q: If an unpeeled, unwrapped fruit (e.g., apple, banana, or clementine) is set out in an unrefrigerated bin/container for students to take, and it is not taken by a student by the end of the day, can it be put out for students to take the next day?**

#### Answer:

- Yes, provided the food is/has been protected from contamination (individual paper wrap) by Grab and Go format. The best practice is to provide just enough fruit to be out for the day from the food preparation area for students to use for that day only.

**Q: How long can milk sit unrefrigerated? Can ice packs and a cooler extend this time?**

#### Answer:

- Hazardous food items such as milk must be stored at 4C or less. If out of the fridge it should be consumed as soon as possible. Coolers and ice packs are acceptable however, a thermometer should be used to ensure that appropriate temperature is being maintained. Allowance for hazardous food during preparation is up to 2 hours.

**Q: Is disinfecting a multi-use container the same as washing and sanitizing? If not, what is the difference?**

#### Answer:

- Disinfecting and sanitizing are commonly used interchangeably but have different meanings. Definitions described below:
  - Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.
  - **Disinfecting kills germs** on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.
  - **Sanitizing lowers the number of germs** on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process **works by either cleaning or disinfecting** surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.
  - Disinfecting is a higher standard. However, the Food Premises regulation requires equipment, utensils and multi-use articles to be cleaned and sanitized
  - Same guidance as laid out in the regulation, follow existing practices.

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**Q: What cleaning and sanitizing products should be used to wash and sanitize serving trays/bins?**

**Answer:**

- Clean with dish soap and warm water. Sanitize with one of the following below or through use of a mechanical dishwasher.
  - Multi-use utensils (forks and spoons) shall be sanitized through the use of,
    - (a) clean water at a temperature of at least 77° Celsius, or more, for at least 45 seconds;
    - (b) clean chlorine solution of not less than 100 parts per million of available chlorine at a temperature not lower than 24° Celsius for at least 45 seconds;
    - (c) a clean quaternary ammonium compound solution of not less than 200 parts per million at a temperature not lower than 24° Celsius for at least 45 seconds;
    - (d) a clean solution containing not less than 25 parts per million of available iodine at a temperature not lower than 24° Celsius for at least 45 seconds; or
    - (e) other sanitizing agents if,
      - (i) they are approved for use by Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or the medical officer of health for the intended purpose,
      - (ii) they are used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and
      - (iii) a test reagent for determining the concentration of sanitizer is readily available where the sanitizing takes place.
- Same guidance as laid out in the regulation, follow existing practices
- If using non-commercial dishwasher, ensure to use sanitizer setting or high temperature washing setting. If such setting is not available, then utensils must be manually sanitized with the above mentioned sanitizer after the utensils have been cleaned in the dishwasher

**Q: What is the best sanitizer for each of the following: Hand washing, sanitization of counters, bins, multi-use cutlery, etc?**

**Answer:**

- Products used must meet the requirements described above. Health Canada has a list of hand sanitizers and disinfectants effective against COVID-19 available here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Ones that are effective. We do not recommend specific brands. Health Canada has a list of effective sanitizers.

**Q: For those programs that don't have 3 compartment sinks or a dishwasher, what is the guidance for sanitizing bins/trays?**

**Answer:**

- The program cannot operate if neither 3 compartment sinks or dishwasher is equipped on site

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**Q: What is the difference between buffet and grab and go?**

**Answer:**

- Grab and go is delivery style of food service, it is ready bagged or packaged food such as a milk carton or granola bar or apple in a bag, while buffet refers to having ready-to-eat/prepared food that's unpackaged where utensils are needed for serving and handled by multiple persons. Buffet-style/self-service of food or drink is not permitted at this time, grab and go is acceptable.

**Links:** <http://www.hkpr.on.ca/2020/09/16/covid-19-and-schools/> - HKPR District Health Unit information for schools  
<https://ingoodhands.ca/> - Online Food handler Certification Course

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