

# 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 eating locations that maintain student 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.
- Ensure eating areas and food preparation areas have appropriate signages (ex: social distancing, hand hygiene practices, masking and health screening) and use of floor markers to direct flow of traffic.
- Staff rooms and classrooms should ensure physical distancing of 2 meter/6 feet space for seating. Consider walkways and ensure adequate spacing during walking.
- Staff and students must be seated while eating.
- Once seated, [Remove masks to eat food](#). Place masks in individual paper bags with proper labelling of each student's full name. [Wear the masks](#), whenever standing or walking around.
- Staff and students should perform hand washing before and after eating. Ensure access to a hand-washing sink equipped with soap and paper towels or provide liquid hand-sanitizer with 70% to 90% alcohol content.
- Eating and food preparation surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized with Health Canada approved, virucidal and food grade solution before and after eating food. Follow the manufacturer instructions on label for cleaning and sanitizing procedure and contact time.
- There should be a cleaning and disinfection plan for appliances, shared and common surfaces, utensils, handles, dishwasher, etc.
- Staff who leave for lunch, should follow appropriate hand-hygiene protocols upon return.
- Ensure plans for managing food waste. Also develop plans for daily cleaning and disinfection 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:

- 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.

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## 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:
  - Students must be seated when tasting or consuming food.
  - Leftover food cannot be re-purposed or redistributed.
- Food grown for instructional-based purposes must be washed properly under cold running water before eating.

## 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 prepared in a health unit approved kitchen facility by students in a hospitality / food skill building class, under the guidance of an instructor that is a certified food handler, can be served in a Student Nutrition Program.
- Food in these programs should be made available in a Grab and Go format.
- A designated person should hand out food to students in class.
- All surfaces, food bins and containers should be cleaned and sanitized with Health Canada approved, virucidal and food grade solution. Follow the manufacturer instructions on label for cleaning and sanitizing procedure and contact time.

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 [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](#).

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## Healthy Grab and Go Ideas to Support 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. Call 1-866-888-4577 ext. 5006 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.

For guidance on packing healthy lunches for children visit [unlockfood.ca](https://www.unlockfood.ca)

Please refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions document](#) for more details.