

Chatham-Kent Public Health's Guidance to Food in School Settings

This guidance document provides recommendations to reduce the risk of infection while maximizing school community health, and ensuring continued delivery of food-related components of the Ontario curriculum.

Below are food safety guidelines to consider as schools plan for re-opening during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Designate areas in the school for eating.

In the classroom:

- Students are to eat in designated locations to maintain cohorts and maximize physical distance.
- Ensure adequate spacing to adhere to physical distancing guidelines.

In the staff room:

- Staff rooms should ensure physical distancing to maximize space and to adhere to physical distancing guidelines.
- Ensure appropriate signage and use of floor markers to direct flow of traffic, including entrances and exits to staffing area.
- Establish a cleaning and sanitation plan for appliances, shared and common surfaces, utensils, handles, dishwasher, etc. used by staff.

2. Ensure eating spaces and hands are properly cleaned before eating.

- Eating areas (counter tops) should be cleaned and sanitized before and after eating food.
- Staff and students are to perform hand-washing before and after eating. Schools are to ensure access to handwashing using soap and paper towels.
- As an alternative, use liquid hand-sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol content and place at accessible areas throughout the school.
- Ensure plans are in place for managing food waste including daily cleaning and sanitation of commonly used bins/containers.
- Re-filling water bottles from fountains, taps or filling stations that are cleaned and sanitized regularly is preferred.

3. Maintain safety while eating.

- Staff and students must be seated while eating.
- Once seated, face coverings can be removed to eat food. Return face coverings when standing or leaving the eating area.
- 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.

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WHAT TO AVOID

- Student use of microwaves and multi-use appliances, utensils, etc.
- Staff or students leaving school premise for lunch.
- Non-instructional activities that involve students preparing or serving food cannot occur at this time. This includes:
 - Having students prepare food for self serve or communal sharing such as salad bar programs, sharing food for celebrations, and involving students in preparing foods for the student nutrition program.
- Allowing students to drink from the mouthpiece of water fountains.

INSTRUCTIONAL-BASED FOOD USE

- 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 of crops or soil.
 - If food based programs are outdoors i.e.school gardens, masks can be removed as long as students are physically distanced.
- For courses requiring food prep:
 - No sharing of food is permitted.
 - Students may consume only the food they individually have 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 can be permitted when produce is washed before eaten and proper hand hygiene is practiced before and after eating and handling food.

Due to COVID-19, changes will need to be made to any food services that are offered in schools. This refers to both food vendors that cater school programs, such as hot lunches, and school nutrition programs, such as the Student Nutrition Program (SNP).

THIRD-PARTY FOOD SERVICES: Student Nutrition 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. Food offered to students in these programs should minimize risk of infection and food-borne illness, as well as promote good nutrition.

The following strategies are recommended to allow for continued implementation of the Student Nutrition Program:

Type of Food:

- Food in these programs should be made available in a 'grab and go' format. All food items must be pre-packaged or portioned into individual servings. Refrain from serving loose food items, such as pre-cut vegetables that are not wrapped or in packaging.
- Foods served in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines. Refer to local school board, Ontario School Nutrition Standards or Ontario Student Nutrition Program Guidelines.

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Program Delivery:

- Food delivery should be classroom based.
- Individual servings for snacks or meals can be pre-bagged or served in bins to provide students with choice.
- There can be no bulk "self-serve" items.
- Students cannot be involved in food preparation or serving for non-instructional activities.
- A designated server (staff) is handing out the food items onto a paper plate.

Infection Control and Disinfection Procedures:

- A designated server (staff) is handing out the food items.
- Students must wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer prior to receiving food and eating.
- Do not provide uncovered loose food.
- Consider having students line up 2 metres apart in a line, or, have one student at a time come up to the bins.
- All surfaces, bins and containers for food should be disinfected with 200ppm of quaternary ammonium compound solution prior to and after each use.
- Staff or volunteers handling and/or preparing food must meet the requirements of the [Ontario Food Premise Regulations](#).
- Limit the number of staff in kitchens and ensure physical distance is maintained during food preparation.
- Students cannot be involved in food preparation or serving for the student nutrition program.
- Food handing outside of the food preparation area should be minimized as much as possible. This can include the pre-portioning of foods, where feasible, in advance of being transported to the classroom. If it is not feasible to pre-portion the food in advance of transport, food can be portioned in the classroom as long as the principle of minimizing food handling is considered. For example a staff handling the food items to provide to students.

Please note:

- Foods prepared and packaged off-site for individual use must be from an inspected facility. Contact Chatham Kent Public Health to consult with your local public health inspector.
- Foods served in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines. If you have questions, contact Chatham-Kent Public Health to consult with your local public health dietitian for more details.

Healthy Grab and Go Food Ideas

Some ideas include:

- Whole, unpeeled fruits like bananas, apples, oranges, peaches, pears
- Individually packaged/pre-portioned 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
- Individually packaged/pre-portioned unsweetened, ready-to-eat cold cereals, with whole grain, whole wheat, or bran as the first ingredient.
- Individually packaged/pre-portioned 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/pre-portioned sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, nut-free butter (in accordance with your school's anaphylaxis policy)
- Individual packages/pre-portioned roasted chickpeas or beans
- Individual containers/pre-portioned low-mercury, boneless fish such as light tuna or salmon

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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/pre-portioned non-processed cheese slices/strings, boiled eggs, hummus
- Individually packaged sandwiches, subs, salads, wraps, etc.

Please note:

- 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

THIRD-PARTY FOOD SERVICES: cafeterias and lunch programs

If school boards decide to offer food from external vendors e.g. lunch program or school cafeteria, the following guidelines are recommended:

- Food for these services should be made available in a grab and go format.
 - For cafeterias, Food should be portioned into individually portioned containers.
 - For special school lunch days, food should be delivered into individually portioned containers.

Infection Control and Disinfection Procedures:

- Students must wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer prior to getting food and eating.
- Do not provide unpackaged loose food.
- Students should be instructed to grab their item and refrain from touching anything else.
- Consider having students line up 2 metres apart in a line, or, have one student at a time come up to the bins.
- All surfaces, bins and containers for food should be disinfected with 200ppm of quaternary ammonium compound solution prior to and after each use.
- Limit the number of staff in kitchens and ensure physical distance is maintained during food preparation.
- Staff or volunteers handling and/or preparing food must meet the requirements of the Ontario Food Premise Regulations.

Please note:

- Foods prepared and packaged by a third party operator for student use must be from an inspected facility. If you have questions, contact Chatham Kent Public Health to consult with your local public health inspector.
- Foods served in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines. If you have questions, contact Chatham-Kent Public Health to consult with your local public health dietitian for more details.

Please, refer to the Ministry of Education's Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools for more information on lunch/food service recommendations.

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