

Student Nutrition Program frequently asked questions: COVID and Food Safety

The following are questions and related answers that were put together for SNPs. This document offers guidance on the recommended operations from a COVID and food safety perspective.

General points on COVID-19 and food:

- The primary mode of COVID-19 transmission continues to be close contact with an infected person or their respiratory droplets.
- While it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.
- The risk of getting COVID-19 from food is thought to be very low. Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food or food packaging.
- SNPs should remain vigilant and follow good hygiene and food safety practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- The fundamental food safety principles and legislation (i.e. Ontario Food Premises Regulation) remain unchanged, and the requirements prescribed in the food safety regulations should be maintained regarding safe food handling to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission.
- Key areas of Public Health guidance for COVID-19 are: staying home when sick, health screening, physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting, wearing of masks or face covering, etc. for more information visit: ckpublichealth.com

Hand hygiene:

Q1: 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?

- Proper hand hygiene refers to either hand washing or using hand sanitizer.
- If available, hands should be washed with warm water and soap for 20 seconds. As an alternative, alcohol based hand sanitizer which contains a minimum of 60% alcohol may be used before and after eating if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Hand washing is needed if hands are visibly dirty, because the hand sanitizer will not be as effective on areas with debris.
- Students may use hand sanitizer before and after they eat if a sink is not available, as long as their hands are not soiled.

Q2: Can a hand sanitizer be used, or is hand washing required before preparing food?

- Food handlers preparing and handling for others, must wash their hands with soap and water before handling food. 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. When preparing food for others, your hands should be as clean as possible to avoid contaminating another person's food.

Please note there is a distinction between recommendations for those preparing food (i.e. hand washing) and those eating food (i.e. hand sanitizer, if hand washing is not accessible).

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Preparing food:

Q3: Should food be pre-portioned into individual servings in a food preparation area before being transported to the classroom?

- Food handling 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.
- 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.

Q4: 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?

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

Transporting food:

Q5: Can SNPs continue to use bins to transport food to the classroom for serving? Are there better options which provide more food safety protection?

- Bins may continue to be used, provided all food is protected from contamination (e.g. plastic wrap, containers with covers, prepackaged foods, etc.).
- Depending on the food items, the use of trays are preferred over bins (e.g. loose apples) to allow for easier selection of food by students and minimizing hand contact.
- If the food inside the bin is already wrapped, then a cover wouldn't be required to protect from contamination.

Q6: Is a cover to the container/bin/tray required? Would plastic wrap or tin foil be suitable?

- 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.

Q7: If shelf-stable food is left out over night or over the week, is a cover required?

- Shelf-stable food can be left out at room temperature, provided it is protected from contamination. If opened, shelf stable food should likely be refrigerated after opening. Read manufacturer's directions to determine this.

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Q8: 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?

- Under the OFPR, 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 once its use has been completed.
- 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.
- Food contact surfaces like trays/bins should be sanitized with a low-level sanitizing solution, not disinfected. Disinfectants are for high-touch surfaces and are often too strong and are not safe to use with food.
- Will a Lysol wipe be OK for food contact surfaces like trays/bins? Depends on the claims made in the manufacturer's directions around sanitizing and use on food-contact surfaces.

Serving food/operating an SNP:

Q9: Is a washed hand or gloved hand acceptable to take food out from a serving tray/bin?

- Hand contact should be minimized where possible by using utensils, especially when handling ready-to-eat foods.
- 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. Handwashing should be performed with soap and water when prepping food. For serving food, handwashing is still preferred, but hand sanitizer may also be used if hands are not soiled. As always, serving utensils are encouraged over hand use.
- Gloves are not recommended for preparing or serving food. Gloves give the misperception of being cleaner however, they get dirty and people don't wash them. If a person chooses to wear gloves, his/her hands should be washed or use hand sanitizer before putting the gloves on.
- 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.

Q10: If a serving utensil is used, which of the following would be most acceptable?

- Only one person touches the utensil and serve to others?
 - This would be most ideal and permitted approach.
- Buffet style/self-service of food or beverage.
 - This is currently not permitted.
- Each person perform proper hand hygiene and then serve themselves.
 - This is not recommended at this time.
- Each person hold the same serving utensil with their own paper towel.
 - This is not permitted at this time.

Q11: Can a teacher portion food items such as, crackers or baby carrots, from a larger bag/box with washed hands onto each student's paper plate?

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- Yes, provided hands are washed prior. Food should be plated before being served.
- Food can be pre-portioned onto a plate in the classroom for immediate consumption.

Q12: 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?

- No. Individually wrapping food isn't required as long as they're kept protected from contamination.

Q13: 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 be served 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?

- 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:

Q14: Are SNP Coordinators/volunteers required to:

- **Wear a clean mask while preparing food.**
 - Masks are not required from a food safety perspective. 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. SNP's will need to follow mask face covering workplace requirements of the relevant school board. For more information on masks, program volunteers are to contact your school administration.
- **If a mask is required, is a face covering acceptable or does it have to be a proper mask?**
 - In general, a mask or face covering is acceptable. However, SNPs staff/volunteers will need to follow the mask or face covering requirements of the relevant school board.
- **Wear gloves when working with food?**
 - Glove use is not required.
- **Wear full PPE while working with food?**
 - In general, no this would not be required. School board requirements may apply.

Q15: Where and how should SNP Coordinators/volunteers discard the mask when ready to leave the SNP?

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

Q16: What resources or training on protocols for COVID-19 in the schools is available to SNP Coordinators/volunteers?

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- This document provides guidance on operating SNPs for more information discuss with your relevant school board administration or visit ckpublichealth.com for more information.

Q17: Are there specific COVID-19 protocols that are new for SNP coordinators/volunteers to practice? e.g.:

- **Number of people in food preparation space.**
 - Limited to the number of persons who can practice physical distancing of up to 2 metres/6 feet when possible.
 - Even with masks, volunteers need to maintain physical distance.
- **Accepting food deliveries from suppliers.**
 - This protocol has not been changed.
 - There is no need to wipe things down upon receipt.
 - Staff/volunteers accepting food deliveries must wear their mask and maintain physical distancing.
- **Staying home if feeling symptoms**
 - Self-screen protocol must be followed as per school board requirement.

Q18: Do SNP volunteers/coordinators need to be tested for COVID-19 prior to entering food preparation area? And if yes, are they required to show the negative results?

- No, testing is not required to enter the food preparation area for SNPs. Follow the relevant school board requirements for volunteering within the school.

General food safety:

Q19: How long can an unpeeled fruit (e.g., apple, banana, or clementine) sit out unrefrigerated?

- 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.

Q20: If an unpeeled, unwrapped fruit(e.g., apple, banana, 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?

- Yes, provided the food is/has been protected from contamination.
- If it has been touched, it should be washed under cold running water, be protected from contamination, and hasn't spoiled.

Q21: How long can milk sit unrefrigerated? Can ice packs and a cooler extend this time?

- Hazardous food items such as milk must be stored at 4 °C or less. If left unrefrigerated, it should be consumed as soon as possible. Coolers w/ ice packs can be used for temporary storage. A thermometer should be provided to ensure a temperature of 4°C or less is maintained.

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- Coolers and ice packs are acceptable. Allowance for hazardous food to be left out during preparation is up to 2 hours. A thermometer is recommended to help ensure that appropriate temperatures are maintained.

Q22: Is disinfecting a multi-use container the same as washing and sanitizing? If not, what is the difference?

- 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. These are existing practices and have not changed.

Q23: What cleaning and sanitizing products should be used to wash and sanitize serving trays/bins?

- This requirement is unchanged. Serving tray/bins need to be cleaned with dish soap and warm water followed by sanitization. This can be done through the following ways or through the use of a mechanical dishwasher.
 - (a) clean water at a temperature of at least 77° Celsius, or more, for at least 45 seconds;
 - (b) a 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 can be used if:
 1. They are approved for use by Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or the medical officer of health for the intended purpose,
 2. They are in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and
 3. A test reagent for determining the concentration of sanitizer is readily available where the sanitizing takes place.

Q24: Is there a difference in process for washing and sanitizing food contact surfaces (serving trays/bins) versus non-food contact surfaces (table tops)?

- High-touch surfaces that are not food contact surfaces may have disinfectants applied to them. Food contact surfaces may only be sanitized.

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Q25: What is the best sanitizer for each of the following: Hand washing, sanitization of counters, bins, multi-use cutlery, etc.?

- 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>
- We do not recommend specific brands. Health Canada has a list of effective sanitizers.

Q26: For those programs that don't have 3 compartment sinks or a dishwasher, what is the guidance for sanitizing bins/trays?

- A 2-compartment sink may be used for the purposes of dishwashing where only single-use utensils are used (e.g. pots and pans).
- Where multi-use utensils are provided (e.g. silverware, porcelain bowls, glass cups), a 3-compartment sink is necessary for dishwashing.
- If the facility has a commercial dishwasher or a residential dishwasher that is NSF/ANSI 184 certified, multi-use utensils may be adequately washed and sanitized without the use of a 3-compartment sink.

Q27: What is the difference between buffet and grab and go?

- Grab and go is pre-packaged food so like a milk carton or granola bar. Students are lined up physical distanced and wearing a mask (for appropriate grade levels) or one at a time. A designated server is handing out the items. This is ideal scenario.
- 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.
- At this time, it is NOT recommended that students help themselves to the ready to eat foods. A designated server is ideal.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to discuss, please contact the Student Nutrition Coordinator, Allan Davies.

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