

## Food in Schools During COVID-19

Despite the removal of most public health restrictions, the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other infections remains. While it's easy to assume we can return to how things were in schools before the pandemic, some COVID-19 preventive measures remain strongly encouraged.

Follow these recommendations to promote safe and healthy eating habits at school, and to ensure continued delivery of food-related components of the Ontario curriculum, all while reducing the risk of infection:

### Maintain Safe Food Handling and Sanitation Practices

- Ensure access to warm water and soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage staff and students to perform hand hygiene for at least 20 seconds:
  - » Before and after eating
  - » Upon return from a lunch outing
  - » Before and after handling food, crops, or soil for instructional-based food use or food distribution
- Regularly clean and disinfect eating surfaces and other shared items like appliances.
  - » Note: The use of microwaves and multi-use appliances, utensils, etc. is permitted.
- Ensure plans are in place for managing food waste including daily cleaning and sanitation of commonly used bins/containers.

### Create Healthy and Safe Eating Spaces

- Ensure good ventilation in eating spaces. Open windows, if possible.
- Consider eating outdoors, when possible.
- Where possible, schedule lunch breaks to reduce the number of people eating in proximity to each other.
- Allow enough eating time for students and staff to feel relaxed, enjoy food and socialize.
- Limit distractions such as screens, devices, etc.

### Food and Drink Service

- Consider serving food in individual serve containers or dishes.
- Avoid self-service from a buffet table, salad bar, and common platters, dishes, and containers.
- Have one person serve or portion out food and drinks prepared on school premises or from food service establishments.
- Foods prepared at home should not be brought to school to share with others during celebrations or other occasions.
- Consider using water filling stations or water fountains to fill personal water bottles instead of using the spout for drinking.
  - » Personal water bottles should be labelled and should not be shared.
  - » Clean and sanitize fountains, taps or filling stations regularly.

## Instructional-Based Food Use

- Students and staff involved in instructional-based learning with food (such as hospitality programs, curriculum-based activities like planting seeds, cultural aspects of food, etc.) must follow regular safe food handling and sanitation practices as required by the Ontario Food Premise Regulations.
- Food prepared or grown for instructional-based purposes may be shared with others.
- Visit <https://brightbites.ca/educators/> for tips for all educators to help teach nutrition in a positive way.

## School Food Programs

- Nutrition/third party food programs are permitted to operate if food handlers use adequate [food handling and safety practices](#), as required by the [Ontario Food Premise Regulations](#).
- Food served must meet the [SNP guidelines](#).
- While not required, consider offering food items through a “grab and go” format.
- For more information and resources on Student Nutrition Programs, visit: [Student Nutrition Program - Nutrition Guidelines 2020 \(ontario.ca\)](#). See pages 35 - 37 for “grab go” snack ideas.

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