

COVID-19

Lambton Public Health's Guidance to Food in School Setting

This 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 re-open:

1. Designated eating areas

In the classroom:

- Students must eat in classrooms 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

- Clean and sanitize eating areas (desks, tables and counter tops) before and after eating.
- Staff and students should wash hands before and after eating. Schools must ensure access to hand washing using soap and paper towels.
- Use liquid hand-sanitizer, minimum 60% alcohol content, at accessible areas throughout the school, to supplement soap and water.
- Provide plans to manage food waste including daily cleaning and sanitation of commonly used bins/containers.
- Water bottles must be filled rather than students drinking directly from the mouth piece of water fountains.

3. Maintain safety while eating

- Staff and students must be seated while eating and maintain physical distancing.
- Once seated, face coverings can be removed. 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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Things to Avoid

- Student use of shared items such as microwaves, toasters and utensils.
- Staff and students drinking directly from the mouthpiece of water fountains

Non-instructional activities that involve students preparing or serving food cannot occur at this time. These include:

- Students preparing food for self serve or communal sharing such as:
 - salad bar programs
 - sharing food for celebrations
 - food preparation for the Student Nutrition Program

Instructional-based Food Use

Students and staff involved in instructional-based learning involving food handling and/or preparation must:

- Practise regular safe food handling and sanitation practices as required by the [Ontario Food Premises Regulations](#).
- Perform hand-hygiene before / 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 physical distancing.

For courses requiring food prep:

- Food sharing is **not** permitted
- Students may consume only the food they have prepared
- Students must be seated when tasting or consuming food
- Leftover food cannot be re-purposed or redistributed

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

Student Nutrition Program

Provincial guidance suggests food should be distributed 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 continued implementation of the Student Nutrition Program:

Type of Food

- Food should be available in a 'grab and go' format. All food items must be pre-packaged or portioned into individual servings. Refrain from serving food items, such as pre-cut vegetables that are not wrapped or packaged.
- Foods served in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines such as the School Food and Beverage Policy and the Student Nutrition Guidelines.

Program Delivery

- Food delivery should be classroom based.
- Individual servings for snacks or meals can be pre-bagged and served in bins to provide students with choice.
- No buffet style food service including shared utensils such as tongs or spoons.
- Students cannot be involved in food preparation or serving for non-instructional activities.

Infection Control and Disinfection Procedures

- Students must wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer prior to and after getting food and eating.
- Do **not** provide unpackaged food, with the exception of whole fruit.
- Students should be instructed to grab their item and refrain from touching anything else.
- Have students line up while practicing physical distancing.
- All surfaces, bins and containers for food should be disinfected with food grade quaternary ammonium 200 ppm or bleach at 100ppm.
- Staff or volunteers handling and/or preparing food must meet the requirements of the [Ontario Food Premises Regulations](#).
- Limit the number of staff/volunteers in kitchens and ensure physical distance is maintained during food preparation.

Please note:

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

Healthy Grab and Go Food Ideas

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 (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, 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%), 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: 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 should be in a grab and go format.

- **Cafeterias:** food should be portioned in individually portioned containers.
- **Special school lunch days:** food should be offered in individually portioned containers.

Infection Control and Disinfection Procedures

- Students must wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer prior to and after 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 while maintaining physical distance or have one student at a time come 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 Premises 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 Lambton Public Health.
- Foods served in schools should meet applicable nutrition standards or guidelines. If you have questions, contact Lambton Public Health to consult with a registered dietitian.

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