

Excellent health and care, for everyone,  
everywhere, every time.



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October 15, 2020

Attention: School Districts 61, 62, 63 & 64, Parents, Teachers and Administrators, School Board Trustees, & Supporters of Healthy School Food

**Re: Supporting Healthy, Local School Food through a COVID-19 Lens**

As your schools find their way during the COVID-19 pandemic, we wanted to connect about school food. We recognize there are some unique challenges this year to ensuring that students remain safe and healthy at school, and we do not want food safety concerns to be a barrier to healthy school food programs. Healthy school food programs benefit the physical and mental wellness of students, support student learning, and increase community connections within schools. To support healthy, local food in schools, below are some questions and answers around food safety in schools during the pandemic.

*Q: Can COVID-19 be transmitted through food?*

A: There are no documented cases nor any evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be spread through food or packaging.

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/food-safety>

*Q: Why is it not recommended to bring home-prepared food for in class or school-based celebrations into schools at this time?*

A: There are less checks and balances on how home kitchens are sanitized, how food is prepared, and with what ingredients. Preparing food at home can increase the number of people handling the food as well as increase the number of people coming into the school which may pose a risk. It is recommended that foods come from approved sources, and to not share food and drinks at this time. Although many parents enjoy bringing food treats into classrooms for child birthdays, now is the time to explore celebrating without food. As an alternative, parents and teachers can look online for other fun ideas.

Please note: this does not apply to a student's lunch brought from home.

*Q: Do we need to take special precautions to prepare and serve food in schools during the pandemic?*

A: The standard food safe principles that are used to limit the spread of any foodborne illness will prevent the spread of COVID-19. School administration protocols for preventing the spread of COVID-19 will be necessary for those working with food in the school (such as mask use, safe numbers of people working in a space, enhanced cleaning/sanitation etc.). Environmental Health Officers can provide support to school staff or volunteers with plans around food safety and cleaning. Food safety plans are recommended (but are not required for breakfast programs, salad bar programs or other food access programs that are not regulated under the *Food Premises Regulation*). For more information on food safety, please visit the Island Health and BCCDC webpages, or contact your local Environmental Health Office:

<https://www.islandhealth.ca/learn-about-health/food-safety/food-safety>

[http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID\\_public\\_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_public_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf)

(Appendix D)

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*Q: Can produce from school/community gardens be served to students?*

A: Yes, fresh fruits and vegetables can be served to students if they are prepared in the school kitchen or another approved kitchen (i.e. Island Health approved). Excess produce can go home with students.

*Q: Can reusable dishes be used safely in school food programs?*

A: Yes, reusable dishes can be safely used if washed on the sanitize cycle in a standard dishwasher (NSF standard 184) or washed in a commercial dishwasher. If a dishwasher is not available, it is safe to wash, rinse and sanitize dishes in three separate sinks or basins. Otherwise, we recommend single use disposable containers.

[http://www.foodsafe.ca/docs/Common\\_Sanitizing\\_Solutions.pdf](http://www.foodsafe.ca/docs/Common_Sanitizing_Solutions.pdf)

<https://www.islandhealth.ca/sites/default/files/2018-05/dishwashing-steps-sign.pdf>

*Q: Should I wear gloves when preparing and serving food?*

A: Good hand hygiene is key to preventing the spread of viruses. Handwashing is preferred over glove use when preparing and serving food. This is due to the fact that gloves can give a false sense of security and sometimes are not changed as often as they should in order to prevent cross contamination. Good handwashing includes washing your hands for 20 seconds under running warm water before, during and after preparing and serving food. Alternatively, hand sanitizer (minimum of 60% alcohol) can be used, along with assigning specific duties to workers with good education and oversight on glove use (i.e. frequent change of gloves).

*Q: Will parents and community volunteers be able to help with school meal programs?*

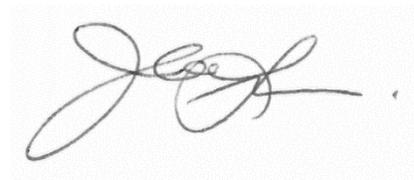
A: Please have parents work with School Administrators in advance of entering the school if coming on site for food prep or meal service. COVID-19 Precautions, such as mask use, wellness checks, and adhering to the appropriate number of people able to work in a space, will be outlined by the school's Administration Protocols.

*Q: Are Salad Bar Programs able to operate safely at this time?*

A: Yes, Salad Bars are able to safely operate. It is recommended that children be served (or food be pre-plated), and not operated as a buffet-style Salad Bar. Environmental Health Officers can provide support to school staff or volunteers with reviewing safety plans if needed.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or if you are looking for healthy schools support.

In good health,



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