

# Student Nutrition Programs and COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

The information provided below is based on Government of Ontario guidelines and recommendations. School board policies and workplace requirements may differ from the information below. In the case of conflicting information, the school board policy should be honoured.

## **Only essential visitors are currently permitted on school property. Are Student Nutrition Program (SNP) coordinators and volunteers essential visitors?**

Essential visitors include anyone who is delivering an essential function within a school. As Student Nutrition Programs are currently permitted to operate within schools, SNP site coordinators and volunteers are considered essential visitors.

## **How should volunteers/coordinators screen for COVID-19?**

Prior to arriving at a school, coordinators and volunteers must complete a self-assessment screen, using the screening tool found at [covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/). Note that this is not intended as a diagnostic tool. Anyone experiencing COVID-19 compatible symptoms and/or who believes they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should self-isolate and contact their local assessment centre directly to book an appointment for testing. For more information on getting tested for COVID-19, visit <https://hpepublichealth.ca/getting-tested-for-covid-19/>

## **Should masks be worn when preparing food for SNP's?**

While masks are not required from a food safety perspective, visitors to schools must wear a medical mask while on school premises to align with COVID-19 infection prevention and control protocols.

## **If masks are worn in food preparation or serving areas, is there a need for physical distancing?**

Physical distancing of at least 2 metres should be always promoted as much as possible. Physical distancing measures are to be supplemented with other public health measures such as screening, enhanced cleaning, hand hygiene, and the use of masks.

## **Should gloves be worn when preparing food for SNP's?**

The use of gloves is not recommended for food preparation. Hand hygiene is preferred over gloves. Food handlers must wash their hands with soap and water before and after preparing food, and as often as necessary to prevent the contamination of food, utensils, and equipment

## **Can students still be involved in the preparation or serving of food?**

Schools are not permitted to plan non-instructional activities that involve students in preparing or serving of food at this time. All food preparation and serving must be done by adults (school or SNP program staff/volunteers), with the exception of course and/or curriculum-linked food preparation tasks that are completed by students during instructional time as part of their learning program (e.g. sorting bins or helping with ordering under supervision from a teacher or EA).

(October 2020)

## **Can COVID-19 be spread through food or food packaging?**

Current evidence suggests that COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through close contact with an infected person. It is possible, but understood to be less common, that a person could become infected by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. The risk of becoming infected from packaging is low as the virus does not survive very long on these surfaces. There is currently no evidence to show that COVID-19 spreads through food.

## **Can foods be cut and pre-portioned into individual servings or should all food served be pre-packaged?**

Requirements under the Ontario Food Premises Regulation have not changed. Food preparation is permitted in an inspected kitchen and foods can be cut-up **and pre-packaged** prior to serving by a volunteer or school staff following proper food handling measures.

## **Do unpeeled vegetables and fruit (e.g., apples, mini cucumbers, bananas) need to be wrapped or pre-packaged before being served to students?**

No. Whole vegetables and fruit should be washed under cool running water and then placed on/in a clean, sanitized tray, container, or bin.

## **Can schools organize a cereal drive (i.e. ask families to send with their students a box of cereal that meets the SNP guidelines)?**

This would be permitted if the items are "quarantined" (set aside without being touched) for at least 72 hours after being received from the students. While the risk of transmission through objects and food is believed to be low, this is an additional precautionary measure that will help keep students and staff safe.

## **Can food for an SNP be served buffet-style?**

The Ontario government's [Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#) recommends that nutrition programs use a "Grab and Go" format to serve food to students. This format requires that food be individually packaged and distributed with the least amount of handling.

## **Does SNP food need to be served in the classroom?**

No. Having food brought to the classroom in a bin or tray is ideal because there is less movement of people. If students need to get their food in an area outside their classroom, they should be instructed to wash their hands before accessing the food, and avoid touching anything on the way there or back. Students should remain in their cohort (with physical distancing in place) and not congregate with other cohorts.

## **Can students select their own food from the bin or does an adult need to serve students?**

Both options are acceptable. A designated adult can offer items to students after performing proper hand hygiene. Students can also self-select food from pre-portioned/pre-packaged items set up at a "Grab and Go" station, with the following measures in place:

- Students must perform hand hygiene immediately before selecting items. While hand washing is preferred, hand sanitizer is acceptable if students' hands are not visibly soiled.
- Students should be instructed to select their preferred food item(s) and refrain from touching anything else in the bin.

- Multi-use utensils (i.e. that are touched by more than one person) are not used.

### **Should serving utensils be used to serve food?**

Food should be served in a way that minimizes hand contact. If utensils are used for serving, one person should use the utensil and serve others. Contact with food can also be minimized by using barriers (such as napkins) whenever possible.

### **Can “Grab and Go” stations be set up in multiple areas (e.g. each screening area for student entry)?**

SNP stations can be set up in any areas that are accessible for cohorts of students. If it is not possible for an adult to serve students in each area, students can self-select food items with additional infection prevention and control measures in place:

- Students must perform hand hygiene immediately before selecting items. While hand washing is preferred, hand sanitizer is acceptable if students’ hands are not visibly soiled.
- Students should be instructed to select their preferred food item(s) and refrain from touching anything else in the bin. Any items touched but not selected by a student should be removed from the bin.
- Multi-use utensils (i.e. that are touched by more than one person) are not used.

### **Proper hand hygiene is required before and after eating. Can hand sanitizer be used, or do hands need to be washed?**

Hand-washing is preferred over hand sanitizer. Hands should be washed with soap and water for 15 seconds. If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of at least 60% is acceptable if hands are not visibly dirty.

### **What is the best way to serve food items that must remain cold in a “Grab and Go” format?**

If serving perishable foods immediately, placing them in a clean, sanitized bin is acceptable. If the food will be sitting out for a period of time, it should be placed in an insulated container. Any perishable food that stays out longer than 2 hours must be discarded.

### **How often do classroom bins need to be sanitized?**

Classroom bins need to be sanitized daily if students are self-selecting items from the bin. If the teacher or another adult is offering food items to students, it would be sufficient to sanitize the bin weekly as long as the individual is performing hand hygiene and is the only one touching the bin.

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