

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR STUDENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS (SNP)

COVID-19 Introduction:

- The primary mode of COVID-19 transmission continues to be close contact with an infected person through their respiratory droplets
- While it may be possible to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes, this is not considered to be the common way the virus spreads
- The risk of getting COVID-19 from food is considered 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., [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
- It is important to follow public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19:
 - Stay at home if you are not feeling well - even if your symptoms are only mild
 - Practice physical distancing by staying 2 metres from others outside of your household
 - Wash your hands thoroughly and often
 - Practice good respiratory etiquette
 - Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
 - Wear a face mask or covering when inside public spaces and when physical distancing cannot be maintained
 - Clean high-touch surfaces often

General infection prevention and control practices to help reduce the risk of acute respiratory illnesses (including COVID-19)

- Post [Hand Washing](#) and [Hand Sanitizing](#) posters in visible locations around the setting
- Remind staff to avoid touching their face with unclean hands
- Wear a [mask](#) (a mask or face covering is required in all enclosed public places)
- Ensure liquid hand soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers are available and refilled regularly
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations for students
 - Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to SNP staff who are unable to wash their hands frequently with soap and water
 - Offer supervised hand hygiene for students (e.g., have a staff member pump alcohol based hand sanitizer into students' hands as they enter the classroom)
- Ask all staff, volunteers and students to engage in good respiratory etiquette (e.g., cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze with a tissue, or cough or sneeze into the bend of their elbow and not their hand)
 - Post [Cover Your Cough or Sneeze](#) posters in visible locations around the setting(s)
 - Enhance [cleaning and disinfecting measures](#) of high traffic and frequently touched surface

COVID-19 and Food

- To date, there is no evidence that people can get COVID-19 by eating or handling food
- Lower the risk of infection and eliminate the virus that causes COVID-19 by following safe food handling and cooking practices:
 - Use common cleaning and disinfection methods
 - Wash your hands with soap and warm water for a minimum of 15 seconds before and after handling food and food packaging. If you do not have running water, use one of the approved hand sanitizers

- Wash your fruits and vegetables under drinking water. Washing fresh produce with soap, chlorine or other chemicals is not recommended. Fresh produce is porous and can absorb chemicals that are not intended for you to eat
- Cook your food to the recommended safe internal temperatures. Coronaviruses are eliminated by minimum cooking temperatures
- Avoid cross-contamination of raw and ready-to-eat or cooked foods
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces that will come in contact with food
- York Region's [Food Handler Certification](#) manual explains safe food handling practices that can reduce the risk of food-borne illness

Reduce the Risk of Transmission during Activities

- Ensure staff and students have completed the self-screening tool each day:
 - [Staff self-screening tool](#)
 - [Student self-screening tool](#)
- Anyone who has travelled outside of Canada, including the United States, must stay home and self-isolate for 14 days immediately after returning
- Adjust hours and shifts to reduce the number of people in the food preparation area, while maintaining a 2 metre/6 feet distance
- Instruct staff/volunteers to report any illness to the site authority (e.g., school principal). Even those with mild illness should remain home and not attend the school.
- Ensure environmental cleaning and disinfection is performed on a routine and consistent basis (consider a schedule). This also needs to be discussed with any contracted cleaning company/agency. Consideration for the following should be made:
 - Attempt to have additional cleaning supplies on site. Commonly used (household) [cleaners and disinfectants](#) are effective against COVID-19
 - Surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition. Examples include:
 - Doors, appliance handles, light switches, counters, handrails, touch screen surfaces and keypads
 - Shared equipment (e.g., telephones, computer keyboard, tablets, walkie-talkies)
 - Use only [disinfectants](#) that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an eight digit number given by Health Canada that confirms it is approved for use in Canada
 - Store all disinfectants in a safe place accessible to staff and volunteers only
 - Check the expiry date of products and always follow manufacturer's instructions
 - Ensure manufacturer recommended wet-contact time is achieved. Wet-contact time is the minimum time required for items to be in contact with the disinfectant to ensure germs and viruses are killed. Place equipment that has been disinfected on a clean surface to air dry. Do not actively dry with a cloth towel

For more information

- york.ca/covid19
- york.ca/mandatorymasks
- york.ca/safeatschool
- foodforlearning.com/resources

Videos

- Public Health Ontario [Putting on Facial Protection](#)
- Public Health Ontario [Taking off Facial Protection](#)
- York Region Public Health [Correct Handwashing Procedures](#)
- Toronto Public Health [COVID-19 & Student Nutrition Programs \(Part 1\)](#)
- Toronto Public Health [Food Safety & COVID-19 Guidance for Student Nutrition Programs \(Part 2\)](#)

Frequently asked questions for SNP

Hand hygiene:

Q: 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?

- If available, hands should be washed with warm water and soap for a minimum of 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer which contains 60-90% alcohol may be used before and after eating if hands are not visibly soiled
- Proper hand hygiene refers to either hand washing or using hand sanitizer
- General guidance is to wash your hands before and after eating food if they are visibly dirty. Hand sanitizer will not be as effective on areas with debris or dirt. Hand sanitizer can be used when hands are not visibly dirty or if there is no access to soap and running water
- Food handlers must wash their hands with soap and water

Preparing food:

Q: Should the 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 pre-portioning items in the food preparation area before transporting items to the class room.
- 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 apples or passing around a tray to serve yourself) is currently not permitted

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

- As 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
- Hand washing with soap and water is the standard when preparing food as is outlined in the OFPR. When preparing food for others, your hands should be as clean as possible to avoid contaminating another person's food
- Students may use hand sanitizer before and after they eat if a sink is not available, as long as their hands are not visibly dirty

Q: 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, direction for utensils, equipment and food handlers remain unchanged.

Transporting food:

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

- Bins or trays can be used to transport snacks and meals, provided all food is protected from contamination (e.g. food grade plastic/paper wrap, containers with covers, prepackaged foods)
- Before food bins or trays are picked up from the food preparation area, all staff, volunteers and students should wash their hands with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60-90% alcohol concentration) if their hands are not visibly dirty, and be instructed not to touch the food in their bins/trays
- Bins and trays for food must be washed, rinsed and sanitized after each use, and when visibly dirty, whichever is more frequent

- If a bin or tray is stored in an area where people can touch it over a period of a day or week (e.g. outside a classroom), the bin/trays should be washed, rinsed and sanitized every day

Q: 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

Q: 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 *Food Premises Regulation*, 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
- If a bin or tray is stored in an area where people can touch it over a period of a day or week (e.g. outside a classroom), the bin/trays should be washed, rinsed and sanitized every day
- Fruit (like loose apples) that are in the bin still need to be washed before being placed in the bin

Serving food/operating an SNP:

Q: Is a washed hand or gloved hand acceptable?

- Hand contact should be minimized where possible by using utensils, especially when handling ready-to-eat foods
- Before a staff or volunteer passes the food out with their hand, they should wash their hands first or use hand sanitizer
- Gloves are not recommended for preparing or serving food. Gloves provide a sense of being cleaner however, gloves get dirty and people don't wash them. If a person chooses to wear gloves, their hands should be washed or use hand sanitizer before putting the gloves on and after taking them off
- If using gloves, it is important to change them when changing tasks:
 - Hands should be washed and/or sanitized between changes
 - When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time
- Before using a serving utensil, hands should be washed
- Teachers may also choose to use single-use disposable utensils or paper towel, to hand food out to students (e.g. apples). Hands must be washed or sanitized prior

Q: What is the best way to serve food safely in a SNP?

When serving food, hand contact should be minimized by using utensils, especially when handling unwrapped foods.

- Grab-and go-formats are preferred
 - Students should either wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer, if their hands are not visibly dirty, prior to selecting and eating food
 - For example, food items can be put together in one container (e.g. paper or plastic bag) for each student, or each item can be available for students to take from its own bin/tray
 - Students should select and touch only the food they are taking
 - Common utensils should not be used
 - Consider having one-way traffic around the SNP area, marking the floors with tape
- Buffet-style or self-service of food or drink, where students are able to select from unpackaged or prepared food (e.g. passing around a tray with common utensils to serve yourself) is currently not permitted
- A teacher can portion and/or serve food items onto individual plates prior to service. Teachers must wash their hands with soap and water prior to food handling, and utensils should be used, where possible
 - Teachers may use single-use disposable utensils or paper towel to hand food to students (e.g. sliced apples, peeled and sliced bananas)

Q: How can we portion out food?

- Buffet style/self-service of food or beverage is currently not permitted
- If it is not feasible to pre-portion food in advance, food can be portioned in the serving area as long as the practice of minimizing food handling is followed
- For example, a teacher could portion food items, such as crackers or baby carrots, onto individual plates prior to service from a larger box/bag. Teachers must wash their hands prior to food handling and utensils should be used, where possible
- Where possible, have one person per food item to portion

Q: 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?

- Whole fruits should be washed under cold running water; wrapping is not required
- Grain products, depending on how they are served, may not need to be wrapped, provided they are transported and covered to prevent contamination

Q: If a snack/meal consists of two or three 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 take from its own bin?

- Food items can be put together in one container (e.g. paper or plastic bag) for each student, or each item can be available for students to take from its own bin/tray with clean hands
 - For example, if the meal includes a granola bar, a carton of milk, and a banana, these items can be packaged together into one bag and put into a bin OR each item could be put into a separate bin/tray
- 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

COVID-19 protocols:

Q: Are there specific COVID-19 protocols that are new for SNP operators to practice? E.g. number of people in food preparation space

- The number of people in the food preparation space should be limited to ensure a physical distance of 2 metres/6 feet. Use this to determine how many volunteers could work in the food prep area at once
- Even with masks there is a need to maintain physical distance
- Post signage at the entrance to the SNP area indicating the maximum number of people that can be permitted at any one time
- Design a flow of traffic that encourages one-way movement with visible signage and/or floor markings
- **Accepting food deliveries from suppliers:**
 - Physical distancing should be maintained at all times
 - Only accept food that are from inspected food premises and are not in the Danger Zone (4°C to 60°C or 40°F to 140°F)
 - Food should be placed in the refrigerator, freezer or hot holding unit
- **Staying home if you have any symptoms:**
 - All staff and volunteers need to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to their shift
 - All staff and volunteers must stay home if they have any symptoms, even mild ones

Q: What other information do I need to support Public Health?

- Keep a log of when and where volunteers worked, with contact information (i.e. name and phone number or email address) in case it is required for contact tracing by York Region Public Health
- York Region Public Health will use this list to help with contact tracing efforts in the event that a person tests positive or an outbreak is identified
- Protect the personal information you collect (e.g. locked drawer/office)
- Keep records for 30 days, and then destroy the information (i.e. shred/delete)

Adapted from Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Food Safety document.