
October 1, 2020

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

Attention: SD71 Parents, Teachers and Administrators, School Board Trustees, & Supporters of Healthy School Food

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, and increase community connections within schools. On September 22nd a Zoom meeting was held to answer questions and concerns around food safety in schools during the pandemic, and to support healthy, local food in schools. Below are some questions and answers from this session.

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 into schools at this time?

A: There are less checks and balances on how home kitchens are sanitized and how food is prepared. 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. It is not recommended to share food and drink at this time.

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 info on food safety please visit the Island Health Webpage and BCCDC:

<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 (Appendix D)

Q: Can produce from 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 (Island Health approved). They should not be prepped (chopped) in home kitchens.

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

A: Yes, reusable dishes can be safely 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 3 separate sinks or basins. 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 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 hand hygiene includes washing your hands for 20 seconds under running warm water (or using hand sanitizer (min. of 60% alcohol) when hand washing is not possible) before, during and after preparing and serving food.

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

A: Please work with School Administrators in advance to enter the school if coming on site for food prep or meal service. COVID-19 Precautions, such as masks, wellness checks, and appropriate number of people able to work in a space, will be outlined by the Schools Administration Protocols. Lush Valley can provide support in recruiting volunteers, purchasing local food and other supports.

Q: Are the 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) rather than operating as a buffet style Salad Bar. Environmental Health Officers can provide support to school staff or volunteers with reviewing safety plans if needed.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions to any of the resources listed below or if you are looking for healthy schools support.

In good health,



Charlene MacKinnon, Senior Environmental Health Officer, Island Health: Charlene.MacKinnon@viha.ca 250-850-2111 (food safety questions)

Kimberley Toonders, Registered Dietitian and Healthy Schools Lead, Island Health: Kimberley.Toonders@viha.ca 250-202-5270 (nutritional expertise, parent and/or volunteer concerns)

James McKerricher, LUSH Valley: fruit@lushvalley.org (help with sourcing local food)

Maurita Prato, Lush Valley: maurita@lushvalley.org (help with sourcing local food, volunteer and food prep support)

Jenn Meilleur, Farm to School Learning Circle Coordinator, Comox Valley f2scomoxvalley@gmail.com (supporting the local Farm to School movement)

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