

COVID-19 Guidance for School Cafeterias

In August 2021, the Government of Ontario introduced the [COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#) to assist in the safe return to in-person learning in September.

In addition to the operational guidance for schools, school cafeterias are food premises that must be in compliance with the [Food Premises Regulation 493/17](#). They are also required to operate in accordance with all emergency orders made under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#).

The information in this document is intended to assist school administrators and school cafeteria operators with the safe delivery of food services programs, highlighting current COVID-19 prevention measures. As each site will be different, it is ultimately the responsibility of every school to review their own policies, procedures and site-specific circumstances, and assess their ability to operate while ensuring that the appropriate infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures are implemented and maintained. The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals, schools, and school boards with information related to the Ontario Government's reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions may constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

Dining in the Cafeteria

- Students may eat together **indoors** with minimum physical distancing of 2 metres between cohorts and should try and maintain as much distancing as possible within a cohort.
- Cafeterias are permitted, with capacity limits, to enable 2 metres of distancing between cohorts and as much distancing as possible within cohorts.
- Additional measures schools may implement to help ensure safety during **mealtimes** include:
 - Staggering eating times.
 - Minimizing loud talking/yelling while masks are off.
 - Eating outdoors where possible.
 - Opening windows where possible.
 - Ensuring desks are not facing one another while students are eating.
 - Removing masks for the shortest amount of time possible while eating.

Cleaning and disinfection of lunch tables

Eating areas are considered high-touch surfaces in the [provincial guidance document](#). Given these are surfaces used by students while unmasked, the level of soilage may be greater than other high-touch surfaces. Increased cleaning and disinfection (ideally in between students) may be beneficial. [Hand sanitizer](#) containing 70% to 90% alcohol concentration should be provided in eating areas to support proper hand hygiene.

Screening process for students and cafeteria operators

- All students, staff and essential visitors must complete COVID-19 screening for [students](#) and [staff/visitors](#) every day before attending school.
- Cafeteria operators shall implement daily on-site confirmation of self-screening for all cafeteria staff and essential visitors, as well as:
 - Keep attendance records for all cafeteria operators, visitors and volunteers that are working/volunteering in the cafeteria.
 - Maintain the records for a period of at least 30 days.

Additional criteria for school cafeterias

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the following infection prevention and control measures **must** be implemented:

- Practice [physical distancing](#):
 - Within the cafeteria and food service areas it is important that there are clear visual cues, such as, arrows taped on floor/walls, signs indicating which tables/chairs to use, to encourage a one-way flow of traffic and facilitate physical distancing.
 - Use physical distancing markers to show where patrons should stand when lining up to purchase food.
 - Ensure everyone maintains a 2 metre distance, including all line-ups for food pick-up and payment.
 - Designate a separate entrance and exit, where possible.
- Single use items must be stored/distributed in a manner in which they are protected from contamination and prevents direct contact of items by multiple people.
- Contactless payment methods are recommended where possible.

Additional criteria for food service and preparation areas

School cafeteria operators must:

- Prepare a written [COVID-19 safety plan](#) and post it for staff to review.

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- Wear medical masks (i.e., surgical/procedural) at all times when indoors; this includes when preparing and serving food.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects their eyes, nose, and mouth if in the course of providing services they are:
 - Required to come within 2 metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering when in an indoor area.
 - Not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier.
- Within the food service and food preparation areas, it is important that there are clear visual cues, such as, arrows taped on floor/walls, signs indicating which tables/chairs to use, to encourage a one-way flow of traffic and facilitate physical distancing.
- Use physical distancing markers to show where operators should stand to maintain a minimum 2 metres distance where possible.
- Recommend assigning staff to specific tasks and minimize contact between them.
- Stagger cafeteria staff shifts and breaks to minimize capacity in any shared space, such that areas in the staff room are reconfigured to ensure physical distance is maintained.
- Train staff on cleaning and sanitizing for food contact surfaces and cleaning and disinfecting of non-food contact surfaces and high-touch surfaces; implement logs for both actions.
- Train staff on how best to serve food, maintain safe physical distancing and avoid unnecessary handling, such as serving to the front of a table and let patrons distribute, avoid handling coffee cups when refilling, let patron fill/pack leftovers in containers.
- Train staff on proper donning and doffing practices when putting on and taking off PPE such as masks and eye protection:
 - PPE should be discarded upon removal.
 - Eye protection, if reusable, should be properly cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions of the products used.
 - Eye protection should not be placed on the same surfaces as where food and drinks are consumed.
- Encourage frequent handwashing, with soap and water, using the correct technique and to avoid touching face.
- Ensure that there is at least one certified food handler onsite during all hours of operation.
- Operators should remind staff to monitor for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) and seek assessment and PCR [COVID-19 testing](#), if necessary:
 - Stay home if sick.
 - Report any COVID-19 Symptoms developed during work to the manager.
- Consult with [Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development](#) and see [COVID-19: enhanced public health and workplace safety measures](#) for all other appropriate measures and ensure they are included in the COVID-19 safety plan.

Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection

- Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting are separate processes.
 - **Cleaning** physically removes dirt.
 - **Sanitizing** reduces the number of microorganisms to a safe level.
 - **Disinfection** kills the microorganisms that are found on the surface.
- Cleaning must be done prior to sanitizing or disinfecting to allow the products to work effectively.
- For proper sanitizing or disinfecting to take place, it is important that surfaces stay wet for the duration of time required by the manufacturer.
- All food contact surface must be cleaned and sanitized, using an approved sanitizer as per the [Food Premises Regulation 493/17](#).
- Use approved disinfectants as per the [Government of Canada](#); Note: all disinfectants approved for use in Canada have a drug identification number (DIN); The products listed on the Government of Canada website are supported by evidence to likely be effective and may be used against COVID-19.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces.
- Ensure self-service units are cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Areas where cafeteria staff take breaks/lunch

The following measures are recommended:

- Chairs are adequately separated to ensure there is at least 2 metres maintained between staff during breaks:
 - Chairs at opposite ends facing each other is in most cases not acceptable as staff will not be wearing a mask.
 - Face chairs in one direction.
- Have disinfectant wipes available to staff for after table and chair use
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces within the staff rooms (e.g., appliances) at minimum twice daily and whenever soiled.
- Have hand sanitizer available.

Additional Resources

- [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Guidance for Elementary and Secondary Schools](#)
- [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Guidance for Schools JK to Grade 12](#)
- [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Guidance Food Premises](#)
- [Toronto Public Health Food Safety](#)
- [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Guidance for Student Nutrition Programs](#)

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- [COVID-19 and workplace health and safety](#)
- [Province of Ontario Restaurant and food services health and safety during COVID-19](#)

More information

For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References

Regional Municipality of York. [COVID-19 Guidance for School Cafeterias](#).

Adapted with permission from the Regional Municipality of York