



Interim COVID-19 Cafeterias and Food Service Operations

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This interim guidance is being provided to support the planning you are undertaking. It was developed by the recommendations put forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in consultation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN), Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), The World Health Organization (WHO) and The Center for Disease Control (CDC). Its recommendations purpose is to provide guidance for keeping school staff and students safe in school cafeterias and other settings where meals are eaten during the school day. This document should be used in conjunction with Pennsylvania Department of Health reopening guidance for school year 2020-2021. These are not requirements but state-level guidance, meant to provide you with what is considered promising practices at the current time based upon what is currently known and understood regarding COVID-19. Promising practices and recommendations are based upon information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and DOH. It is understood that both CDC and DOH guidelines may change based upon new scientific information and epidemiological data and this guidance will be updated to reflect that information.

It is understood that districts have situations that may not fit with aspects of this guidance. School administrators who oversee cafeteria and food services should work with their local and tribal health department to best implement this guidance in order that the measures implemented meet your district's unique circumstances. Further, it is understood that no guidance or mitigation measures will completely remove the risk of exposure to COVID-19 while the SARS-CoV2 virus is still in wide circulation. It is recommended you work with your local health authority, insurance carrier, and legal counsel in determining to what degree your district is able to implement mitigation measures.

INDIVIDUAL GUIDELINES

Continue To Practice Good Hygiene

- ✓ Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching frequently used items or surfaces.
- ✓ Avoid touching your face.
- ✓ Sneeze or cough into a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Sneeze into mask, if wearing one, rather than removing mask before sneezing. Change mask after sneezing into it.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.
- ✓ Strongly consider using cloth face coverings while in public, and particularly when using mass transit.

People Who Feel Sick Must Stay At Home

- ✓ Do NOT go to work, school, or any other public place.
- ✓ Contact and follow the advice of your medical provider.

EMPLOYER GUIDELINES

- ✓ All employers are encouraged to use federal, state, and local regulations and guidance, informed by best practices and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, to develop and implement appropriate policies regarding:
 - Physical distancing and protective equipment
 - Temperature checks and symptom screening
 - Testing, isolating, and contact tracing
 - Sanitation
 - Usage of common and high-traffic areas, and their regular cleaning and disinfection
 - Business travel
- ✓ Do NOT allow symptomatic people to work. Send them home if they arrive at work and do not allow them to return until they have completed home isolation.
- ✓ Work with local public health staff, develop and implement policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following an employee COVID-19 positive test result.

General Behaviors to Decrease Risk of Transmission of COVID-19

School administrators who oversee cafeteria and food services should consider different strategies to encourage healthy behaviors and hygiene practices, including:

Staying Home

- Educate staff about when to stay home. For example, if they have symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive for COVID-19, or were exposed to someone with COVID-19 within the last 14 days. And educate staff on when they can safely end their quarantine or isolation period.
- See DOH's Preliminary Pre-K to 12 Guidance for more information.

Physical Distancing

- Taking measures to ensure that all students and staff maintain a distance of at least six feet decreases the risk of transmission of COVID-19. This is recommended by public health officials and if not feasible then the use of facial coverings is recommended. Students from the same household or living unit may sit together.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Encourage all staff and students to wash their hands often and cover their coughs and sneezes.

- Encourage frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol). Supervise use of hand sanitizer in younger students.

Cloth Face Coverings

- Cloth face coverings do not replace physical distancing or other safety precautions.
- Face coverings are **most** useful when physical distancing is difficult.
- Face coverings slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus from spreading it to others.
 - DOH recommends adults and students over age 2 wear cloth face coverings, if they can properly wear and remove them.
 - Schools should provide masks or cloth face coverings and require food service workers and cafeteria monitors to wear them while performing their duties.
 - Encourage students to wear cloth face coverings as feasible, except when eating.
 - Develop a protocol for how and when students may remove face coverings for eating and when to put face coverings on so that students may talk and socialize from an appropriate physical distance.
 - Work with those who are uncomfortable or unable to wear a cloth face covering – due to health, sensory or racial discrimination concerns – to develop an appropriate alternative. See PPE Considerations for Schools and Cloth Face Coverings in Schools.
 - Consider providing education to staff regarding implicit bias and racial profiling in the context of COVID-19 and face coverings.
 - Consider providing training to all school cafeteria staff, including food service staff to increase knowledge and understanding of the district anti-bullying policy so that all staff know the protocol for consistently responding to both witnessed and reported incidents of bullying.
 - Consider providing education to staff regarding varied sensory needs, as well as alternative options, such as face shields, to those who communicate via American Sign Language.

Signs and Messages

- Post highly visible signs about stopping the spread of COVID-19, including how to properly wash hands, avoid touching face, nose or eyes, and wear a cloth face covering. For example, post signs on the cafeteria entrance door or on lunch tables.
 - Ensure that messaging is translated into the appropriate prevalent languages used by students and staff.
 - Ensure signs include visual clues.

- Provide regular announcements about how to stop the spread on PA system in the cafeteria.
- Share messages about how students and families can stop the spread of COVID-19 in emails, websites (for example, posting online videos), and through social media accounts.
 - Ensure that messaging is appropriate for students from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and living situations.
 - Consider the home language of students and families when posting signs and sending messages.
 - Ensure signs and messaging are provided in alternative formats to successfully communicate information to individuals whose primary language is not English, and to individuals with hearing or vision impairment.
- Tell students that they are not to pass or share any items, including food, with other students.

Adequate Supplies/Tissues

- Ensure adequate cleaning and protective supplies to support healthy hygiene and proper cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- Provide tissues, no-touch trash cans, and hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol in cafeterias and kitchens for students and staff to use.
- Ensure soap and paper towels are available to staff who work in the kitchen.
- Ensure that employees who clean the kitchens and cafeterias have access to personal protective equipment needed to protect them from cleaning and disinfecting chemicals and the coronavirus.
- Educate students and post signs on proper disposal of used tissues.
- Dispose of trash and tissues after each group of students leaves the cafeteria and before the next group arrives as part of cleaning and disinfecting the cafeteria.

Cafeteria and Food Service Specific Recommendations

To maintain environments that are as safe as possible, school administrators who oversee cafeterias and kitchens should consider:

Physical Distancing, Barriers and Suggestion for Creating Space

Creating space between students while eating is important to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Measures to create a minimal distance of at least six feet or physically separate students should be implemented to the full extent possible. Examples of ways to create physical distance may include:

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- Consider closing shared spaces such as cafeterias and other areas where students congregate at mealtimes, if possible, and have students eat meals in classrooms with the same cohort of students. Otherwise, stagger use of cafeterias and clean and disinfect between use.
- If breakfast or lunch is served in classrooms make sure to take measures to ensure the safety of individuals with food allergies.
 - Minimize risk of cross-contact of allergenic proteins in the classroom by reinforcing strict hand washing with soap and water after food contact, disinfection of surfaces after food contact is made, and implement blanket “do not share” food practices.
 - These strategies are consistent with those outlined in the CDC’s 2013 publication “Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs,” and synergize with the principles of hand hygiene and surface washing that also reduce infection spread. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf
- Consider closing the school campus at lunch time so that students are not able to leave school and risk potential exposure in the community.
- Physically separate or create distance of at least six feet between all occupants to the extent possible. This may include:
 - Consider moving furniture, using signage or floor markings, and/or staggering meal times to help make physical distancing intuitive.
 - Closing off seats so that students cannot sit opposite of each other and must sit in a zig-zag pattern, leaving space between seats.
 - Not allowing anyone to sit on the end seat near a thoroughfare.
 - Providing physical guides to ensure that students remain at least six feet apart while moving around in the cafeteria or waiting in line. For example, floor decals, colored tape, or signs to indicate where students should sit or stand can be used to guide students safely.
 - Reducing the maximum occupancy of cafeterias to no more than 50 percent.
 - Installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, particularly in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart. Consider installing a plexi-glass barrier in front of work service workers and cashiers.
- Consider assigned seating in the cafeteria following physical distancing guidelines so that students know where to go when they enter the cafeteria. Allow students from the same household or living unit to sit together.
- Designate areas for students with underlying health conditions to limit exposure to other students.
- Establish one entrance and one exit for a designated eating area to help control traffic flow and monitor how many people are allowed in each room.
- Create one-way traffic flow for thoroughfares, including cafeteria lines or areas where lines may form, and general foot traffic.
- Remove salad bars or other opportunities for self-service or “high-touch” touch points.

- Restrict the number of employees in shared spaces, including kitchens and break rooms.

Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizer Stations

- Install and maintain hand washing and hand sanitizer stations at the entrance to the school cafeteria.
- Require hand washing and/or hand sanitizing for all those entering the cafeteria or, if eating in the classroom, to use hand sanitizer before eating.
- Train all staff monitoring students at meal times of the proper use of hand washing and hand sanitizer stations for themselves and students.
 - Ensure that monitoring students for proper hygiene and physical distancing at meal times is done in a culturally relevant, non-discriminatory manner.

Food Safety

- Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food, it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety. And if you sneeze, cough, or touch your face while working with food, you should immediately wash (or sanitize at a minimum) your hands before returning to food preparation or handling
- You should always handle and prepare food safely, including keeping raw meat separate from other foods, refrigerating perishable foods, and cooking meat to the right temperature to kill harmful germs. See CDC's Food Safety site for more information.
- If breakfast or lunch is served in classrooms make sure to take measures to ensure the safety of individuals with food allergies. Minimize risk of cross-contact of allergenic proteins in the classroom by reinforcing strict hand washing with soap and water after food contact, disinfection of surfaces after food contact is made, and implement blanket "do not share" food practices. These strategies are consistent with those outlined in the CDC's 2013 publication "Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs," and synergize with the principles of hand hygiene and surface washing that also reduce infection spread.
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf

Food Service

- Serve individually plated meals in classrooms instead of in a communal dining hall or cafeteria areas. School districts/private schools must still ensure the safety of children with food allergies. School districts/private schools must continue to meet the requirements under Special Dietary Needs. Children do have the option of bringing meals from home.
- Students should be dismissed by classroom/cohort to come to cafeteria to pick up their meals and take them back to the classroom. This avoids groups of students congregating.

- Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.
- If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee instead of a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid sharing food and utensils and ensure the safety of children with food allergies.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Cafeterias and Kitchens

- CDC recommends routine cleaning and disinfection of all frequently touched surfaces, such as tables, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and disinfectants approved by EPA to be effective against the virus that causes COVID-19, and follow the directions on the label. CDC does not currently recommend any additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning at this time for surfaces that are not frequently touched.
 - Conduct a high-touch audit to identify surfaces that are touched frequently and can become contaminated easily.
 - Clean and disinfect each lunch table and seating after each group of students leaves the cafeteria and before the next group arrives.
 - Clean and disinfect all frequently touch surfaces such as refrigerator handles, tables, chairs, door knobs, door handles, turnstiles, counter tops before and after each meal.
 - Use disinfectants properly.
 - Use disinfectants for surfaces listed under the EPA's Products with Emerging Viral Pathogens AND Human Coronavirus Claims for Use Against SARS-CoV-2.
 - Disinfectants should always be diluted per the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Do not mix chemicals unless proper documentation advises otherwise.
 - Use one set of towels for cleaning (removing dirt and debris) and another for disinfecting (neutralizing particles that cause disease). Always ensure towels are clean and free of oils, dirt, debris and/or residue from other chemicals.
 - Use gloves, eye protection, and other necessary personal protection equipment to prevent direct contact with chemicals.
 - Ensure proper ventilation when cleaning and disinfecting the cafeteria and kitchen area.
 - Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash and wash hands afterwards.

Meal Preparation and Procurement Options

- If possible, maintain on-site meal preparation or split meal preparation across multiple kitchens or locations rather than using a central kitchen. This way, if one location needs to be shut down, others can take over, and fewer staff would be affected.
- Consider working with a local staffing agency.

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- If current kitchens or vendors are unable to meet demands, consider other food service management companies that may have capacity due to school closures as well as private restaurants or caterers that may be able to support efforts.
- If needed, USDA has Emergency Procurement Regulations for Foodservice.

Ventilation

- Increase ventilation rates.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and provide acceptable indoor air quality for the current occupancy level for each space.
- Consider having students eat lunch outside during warmer weather months, if feasible, while maintaining physical distancing and proper hygiene protocols.

Staff Training

- Provide training to staff on proper safety and/or disinfection procedures for school cafeterias and kitchens, following CDC disinfection guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>.
- At a minimum, training should include:
 - All safety protocols;
 - Proper methods for cleaning and disinfecting;
 - Proper use and disposal of and tissues;
 - How to properly put on and take off cloth face coverings;
 - Safe product usage guidelines (chemical safety); and
 - Proper methods for emptying and disposing of trash.
 - How to maintain proper physical distancing.
 - Proper use of hand washing and hand sanitizer stations for themselves and students.
- Consider conducting training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that physical distancing is maintained.

Communications Systems

- Develop a communication plan for notifying staff, your school superintendent, local or tribal health department, and the general public should a site need to close due to detection of COVID-19 among staff.
 - Share your communication plan with your organization's or district's leadership team, including the Superintendent and School Board.
- Determine whether any vendors or partners need to be alerted in order to redirect deliveries or change other operations.
 - If unable to cover the gap created by the site or kitchen closure, coordinate with other program operators or vendors who can serve those sites or families.
 - If needed, ask the state agency for support identifying alternative operators or vendors who could help to fill the gap.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

To maintain healthy operations school administrators who oversee cafeteria and food services should consider:

Protections for Staff Who Are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness

- Offer options such as modified job responsibilities, alternative or remote work locations, reassignment, and physical distancing measures that minimize their contact with students and other employees.

Back-Up Staffing Plan

- Assess staff ability to work and their ability to work at different locations as needed.
 - Some staff may not be available if they are part of a high-risk group, or if they need to care for someone in a high-risk group (e.g., persons over age 60 and persons with pre-existing health conditions).
 - Allow staff who are not able to work on-site to provide support remotely when feasible.
 - Tasks could include supporting outreach and communications, coordinating with partners, responding to inquiries, managing a meal pre-order system.
 - Monitor staff's health and attendance, and create a roster of trained back-up staff to call upon in case of a staffing shortage.
 - Identify staff who can serve as back-ups should an employee become unable to work or an entire team needs to be quarantined.
 - Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff members are absent.
 - Consider consolidating meal preparation and distribution to one or two times per week in order to limit staff exposure.
 - Consider setting up different teams for meal preparation and/or distribution. Schools with limited food service staff may be able to utilize volunteers or other school staff to assist as needed or be part of the separate teams. For example:
 - If Team A works Monday, Wednesday, and Friday then Team B works Tuesday and Thursday.
 - If one team needs to stop working for 14 days, then the other team can take over for all days Monday through Friday.
 - Small teams are better than one or two large teams

Staff Safety

- If your school, district, or organization has a nurse on staff, ask for support with health education for staff or proactively asking employees about symptoms.
- Ensure that staff understand the importance of not coming to work while sick or under self-quarantine due to possible exposure.
 - Remind staff that they may still transmit COVID-19 without or before developing symptoms, which can take up to 14 days from the time of exposure.
- Encourage frequent handwashing for at least 20 seconds each time.
 - Allow staff to take needed time for handwashing before beginning work and after sneezing or touching their phone or face.
 - Refer to the CDC for guidance and resources.
- Provide gloves and urge staff to change them as needed, such as after touching their face.
- In accordance with CDC guidance, provide masks for staff, both those preparing meals and those distributing them.
- Allow staff to stay distanced during meal preparation to the greatest extent possible.
 - Space out work stations and move as many activities as possible, like bagging or assembly, out of cramped kitchens and into unused spaces like the cafeteria.
 - Have just one individual responsible for each task or workstation.
 - Limit how many staff access storage areas or large equipment like refrigerators.
 - Deliver needed items to workstations rather than handing them off personally.
 - Create plastic or plexi-glass barriers between workstations to protect staff from each other in situations where social distancing is difficult to maintain. Also create barriers between staff and students or other school employees they may be serving to protect staff and those that they serve.

Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick

See DOH's Guidance and Resources for Pre-K to 12 Schools for more information. To prepare for when someone gets sick, consider:

- Isolating those who are sick.
- Notifying health officials.
- Cleaning and Disinfecting
 - Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use before cleaning and disinfection.
 - Wait 24 hours before you clean and disinfect. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.