

# Provincial School Food Guidelines Frequently Asked Questions

## Purpose

### Why do we need School Food Guidelines?

Health and education are interdependent: healthy students are better learners, and better-educated individuals are healthier.

School Food Guidelines (SFG) contribute to a healthier school food environment, which is an important part of an optimal learning environment. Healthy eating is an integral component of a student's overall health, both in the short and long term. Schools are an ideal setting for children and youth to have the opportunity to make healthy choices. Offering children and youth healthy food and beverage choices at school helps nourish them to be ready to learn and to build a foundation for life-long healthy eating habits.

### Why were the SFG revised?

An assessment of the 2nd edition of the Provincial SFG (2009) was completed with a broad group of school food stakeholders. The results of this assessment revealed that the Provincial SFG needed to be revised to be more clear, concise and easy to use for schools and school food providers.

Also the new Canada's Food Guide (CFG) was released in 2019 and the Provincial SFG 2nd edition needed to be reviewed for updates based on changes in the CFG.

A new draft of the Provincial SFG was piloted in the 2019-20 school year. Learnings from this pilot and the recommendations from the formal pilot evaluation informed the 3rd edition of the Provincial SFG (2021).

## Creating a Supportive Environment

### How do the Provincial SFG align with Comprehensive School Health?

Healthy eating should be considered in all aspects of the school environment. As part of a Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach, the Provincial SFG support all four inter-related components of the school environment to create a strong foundation for promoting healthy eating at school.

Examples of how the Provincial SFG can be implemented through the components of Comprehensive School Health include:



**Social and Physical Environment** - providing healthy food and beverage options; ensuring sufficient time and comfortable environments to enjoy food with peers

**Teaching and Learning** - meeting outcomes related to healthy eating in the curriculum

**Policy** – integrating nutrition or health policies and school food guidelines

**Partnerships and Services** – working with school food providers and community partners to provide healthy foods and beverages

### **How does the implementation of the Provincial SFG align with the school development model?**

The school development process can be used to support the implementation of the Provincial SFG. School development teams reflect on their school food environment when planning actions under the wellness and positive relationships or optimal learning environments determinants.

The school development cycle provides schools with the mechanism to monitor their progress and set goals for a healthy school food environment. Schools are encouraged to reflect and use evidence to plan next steps for creating healthy school food environments. School district and Regional Health Authority staff can support schools in celebrating successes and addressing challenges.

## **Implementing Provincial School Food Guidelines**

### **What is covered by the Provincial SFG?**

The SFG apply to all foods and beverages that are:

- sold and/or served at school, including cafeterias, vending machines and canteens
- sold and/or served at school sponsored events (e.g. sports, drama); and.
- used for fundraising

### **What is not covered under the Provincial SFG?**

The SFG do NOT apply to foods and beverages students bring from home. Teaching children and families about healthy eating is important, but it is equally important not to assume that all parents have the resources to provide nutritious foods and beverages for their children and to not pass judgement on what students bring from home. Information for parents and caregivers on the new SFG is available at [gov.nl.ca/healthyeating](http://gov.nl.ca/healthyeating). This can be shared with families to update them on the changes to foods and drinks sold or served at school and to support packing [healthy lunches and snacks](#) from home.

### **Can we serve foods or beverages outside the Provincial SFG for school celebrations?**

School administrators may have some flexibility in providing foods or beverages that do not align with the Provincial SFG a few times in the school year. Refer to your nutrition or health policies for guidance. In all cases where food is sold or served in a school setting, student nutrition should be the priority. It is the health and well-being of students, not raising funds, that is the main purpose of selling or serving foods or

beverages at school. All foods or beverages used for fundraising should align with the Provincial SFG. Implementing the Provincial SFG also helps to ensure that school activities do not contribute to the confusion that can come with unhealthy foods and beverages being labelled as “treats” or used as rewards. Identifying foods and beverages in these ways may also give them “special status” which can make them more appealing to children.

Implementing the Provincial SFG can help create healthier processes at your school as well, including planning school fundraisers that don't involve food such as theme days and activity events; celebrating birthdays and special events in the classroom with healthy foods and beverages; and offering non-food items for classroom rewards or prizes. When schools promote healthy food and beverage choices, including during special or celebration days in the school year, it supports the development of positive attitudes toward all foods and beverages.

### **Can foods be used for fundraising?**

Any foods and beverages used for fundraising activities/events must align with the SFG. Foods and beverages that do not align with the SFG cannot be used as a school fundraiser.

Eat Great and Participate has a great resource to support [healthy fundraising ideas](#).

### **Where can I find healthy meal ideas for school menus that meet the Provincial SFG?**

A resource has been created to help school food providers with healthy menu ideas. Planning Healthy Menus for School is available at [gov.nl.ca/healthyeating](http://gov.nl.ca/healthyeating)

### **What if our school does not have access to food items that fit the Provincial SFG?**

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to improving access to healthy food in the province. Provincial SFG are a tool for schools and school food providers to support the creation of a healthier school food environment.

Some schools in rural and remote regions of the province report challenges related to food transportation and access. Government, school districts and the Regional Health Authorities work with schools, school food providers and other stakeholders to strategize and determine ways to overcome these challenges including innovative approaches to food purchasing, transportation and storage. Examples of initiatives that have proven successful include partnerships with local retailers and suppliers to bring in foods and beverages to be served at school.

If accessing foods that meet the guidelines is a challenge, schools and school food providers are encouraged to work with the Regional Nutritionist and [School Health Promotion Liaison Consultants](#) in their region to discuss these concerns and determine how to provide the healthiest available foods and beverages to students.

### **How can school staff support the Provincial SFG and healthy eating in schools?**

Principals, teachers, district staff and school volunteers have an important role in fostering an environment that supports healthy eating. Adults are in a position of influence and, through modelling and promoting healthy eating, play a role in helping children develop healthy eating attitudes and positive body image for life.

To support healthy eating in schools, school staff can:

- follow curriculum outcomes and Canada's Food Guide messaging;
- promote consistent messages in schools about the importance of healthy eating;
- ensure access to the healthiest options available, while limiting the availability of highly processed foods and beverages;
- offer a breakfast program at your school;
- avoid using the word 'diet' as some students may have negative connotations of this word and think of it in terms of food restriction;
- avoid using food as a reward or as a "treat" for special events;
- use non-food items for classroom rewards or prizes;
- promote healthy food and beverage choices, including during special or celebration days in the school year;
- plan school fundraisers that don't involve food such as theme days and activity events;
- celebrate birthdays and special events in the classroom with healthy food choices;
- model and discuss the importance of enjoying food, eating with others, cooking together, getting hands on with food, and cultural aspects of food to support the development of healthy relationships with food; and,
- include healthy eating resources for parents/caregivers in memos and newsletters.

### **How can we engage students in implementing the Provincial SFG?**

It is important to obtain student input to determine how to best implement the Provincial SFG and offer food and beverage options that are healthy and appealing. Schools could use student surveys, incorporation of the Provincial SFG within the curriculum, social media promotions as well as other student engagement activities.

Schools could also host taste-testing events that enable students to try new menu items at no risks (i.e., not having to purchase). Similarly, taste-testing allows students to provide input into the menu items being served, which may increase the chances of students purchasing these menu items. See the resource, Engaging Students in Menu Development, at [gov.nl.ca/healthyeating](http://gov.nl.ca/healthyeating).

### **How do I communicate the Provincial SFG to parents/caregivers?**

Parents and caregivers play an important role in promoting healthy eating. Early, frequent and clear communication with parents and caregivers is integral to the success of the implementation of the Provincial SFG. Parents and caregivers need to be part of the process to not only understand what is happening, but also to have an opportunity to provide input.

Resources have been developed for schools to share with parents and caregivers including correspondence to notify them of the upcoming changes and the purpose of the School Food Guidelines as well as ideas for

healthy lunches and snacks. These resources are available at [gov.nl.ca/healthyeating](http://gov.nl.ca/healthyeating).

### **Will the Provincial SFG address food allergies at my school?**

Schools are “allergy-aware” and students and staff are asked not to bring specific food items into the building to minimize the risk of exposure to food allergens of concern for students or staff in the school. The Provincial SFG should be approached with that allergy-awareness in mind. It is important to align food and beverage offerings with those that are acceptable at your school. Nuts and seeds are healthy protein food choices. Many schools do not permit peanuts and/or tree nuts due to allergy awareness. If your school does allow peanuts and/or tree nuts, they are considered healthy choices to sell or serve at school. Check with school administrators for more information regarding food allergies at your school.

### **Can we serve chocolate milk?**

Milk is an important source of nutrients for school-aged children and youth. In NL, the School Milk Foundation offers white and chocolate milk in the majority of schools as part of the School Milk Foundation’s program. A new chocolate milk with less added sugar has been developed for the School Milk Foundation that meets the criteria outlined in the Provincial SFG. At lunchtime, all school food providers should offer both white and chocolate milk at school.

### **What is a menu review?**

Your Regional Nutritionist can review any new or existing menus for foods and beverages that are sold or served at your school. Items offered in canteens and vending machines will also be included in a menu review. When schools enter into a contract with a school food provider a menu review should be conducted to support the school food provider in offering menu items that align with the Provincial SFG.

The Regional Nutritionist can work with you and the school food provider to determine if menu items meet the Provincial SFG. If some items do not meet the guidelines, the Regional Nutritionist will work with the school food provider to find alternatives. If your school does not have a school food provider, you can still avail of a menu review for canteen/vending items. You can contact the Regional Nutritionist and [School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant](#) in your region to arrange a menu review.

### **When do I need to have a menu review?**

Whenever a new menu is implemented or changed it should be reviewed. School food providers need to ensure that any last-minute or one-time substitutions to menu items, which may not have been a part of the menu review, align with Provincial SFG. Your nutrition or health policies may dictate when your menu needs to be reviewed and approved.

### **What food safety training is needed in our school?**

Cafeterias and canteens should be licensed and compliant with the Food Premises Regulations. This includes having at least one person on site with approved [food safety training](#) (if a licensed kitchen is being used to prepare food for schools).

# Monitoring the implementation of Provincial School Food Guidelines

## How is the implementation of the Provincial SFG monitored in schools?

The Provincial SFG apply to all foods and beverages served and/or sold at school. Implementation of the guidelines is the responsibility of multiple partners and consistent use of the Provincial SFG across schools is key.

The implementation of the Provincial SFG is a component of the school development plan which is actioned, reviewed or reported on annually. The process of collaborative inquiry (design, implement, measure, reflect, change and assess) that rests within school development can be used to support the implementation of the Provincial SFG. Through the school development process, school development teams can reflect on their school food environment when planning actions under the wellness and positive relationships determinant.

The school development cycle provides schools with the mechanism to monitor their progress and set goals for a healthy school food environment. Schools are encouraged to reflect and use evidence to plan next steps for creating healthy school food environment. School district and Regional Health Authority staff can support schools in celebrating successes and addressing challenges.

## What do I do if a parent brings in food items for the whole school or class that do not meet the Provincial SFG?

- In keeping with your nutrition and health policies, and in consideration of students with health concerns (food allergies, diabetes, etc.), request that parents and caregivers do not send food items for their child's classmates. Schools are also cognizant that not all students have the same resources available to them and the school should be a socially just environment. For example, some students may feel uncomfortable because they didn't bring treats for their friends.
- Let parents and caregivers know that teachers have been directed not to distribute treats or special occasion loot bags. Ask parents and caregivers not to place their child's teacher in the difficult position of refusing to distribute items to their class and then sending the items back home with the child.
- Early, clear and consistent messaging to parents, caregivers and the school community is an important aspect of implementing the SFG. You can provide parents with information to support healthy eating found at [gov.nl.ca/healthyeating](http://gov.nl.ca/healthyeating)
- Food donation ideas for the breakfast program that meet the SFG with clear messaging that food items that do not meet the guidelines cannot be accepted. Kids Eat Smart Foundation staff can provide support in this area.

## What can I do if my school food provider is serving items outside of the Provincial SFG?

If you have questions about foods or beverages being served at your school by a school food provider please review the Provincial SFG with them and refer to their contract, which should note that all foods and beverages served must align with the Provincial SFG. If you need support or have questions please contact the

Regional Nutritionist and [School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant](#) in your region.

**Does my school have to follow the SFG or are they voluntary?**

As identified in current policies that support healthy eating in schools, adhering to the Provincial SFG is mandatory for all schools within the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. The SFG apply to all foods and beverages sold or served at school and/or school-sponsored events, as well as foods or beverages used for fundraising.

## Supports available

**Who can I contact if I have questions, feedback or need more support?**

For more information or to give feedback about the Provincial SFG please contact your School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant, or Regional Nutritionist for your school. For any questions about food safety please contact your Environmental Health Officer.

### School Health Promotion Liaison Consultants

Avalon East	<a href="#">Susan Barry</a>	<a href="mailto:susanbarry@nlesd.ca">susanbarry@nlesd.ca</a>	709.758.2388
Avalon West and Vista/Burin	<a href="#">Jennifer Rex</a>	<a href="mailto:jenniferrex@nlesd.ca">jenniferrex@nlesd.ca</a>	709.466.5717
Central	<a href="#">Corey Samson</a>	<a href="mailto:coreysamson@nlesd.ca">coreysamson@nlesd.ca</a>	709.256.2547 ext. 230
Western	<a href="#">Victoria White</a>	<a href="mailto:victoriawhite@nlesd.ca">victoriawhite@nlesd.ca</a>	709.637.6769
Labrador	<a href="#">Andrew Battcock</a>	<a href="mailto:andrewbattcock@nlesd.ca">andrewbattcock@nlesd.ca</a>	709.896.4993

### Regional Nutritionists

Eastern (Metro)	<a href="#">Lesley Burgess</a>	<a href="mailto:lesley.burgess@easternhealth.ca">lesley.burgess@easternhealth.ca</a>	709.752.4422
Eastern (Rural)	<a href="#">Melissa Caravan</a>	<a href="mailto:melissa.caravan@easternhealth.ca">melissa.caravan@easternhealth.ca</a>	709.229.1605
Central	<a href="#">Jill Wheaton</a>	<a href="mailto:jill.wheaton@centralhealth.nl.ca">jill.wheaton@centralhealth.nl.ca</a>	709.651.6335
Western	<a href="#">Lesley French</a>	<a href="mailto:lesleyfrench@westernhealth.nl.ca">lesleyfrench@westernhealth.nl.ca</a>	709.784.6130
Labrador- Grenfell	vacant		709.897.3140

### Environmental Health Officers

The Officer for your region can be found at this [link](#).