



Coalition for Healthy School Food calls for healthy COVID-19 School Food Guidelines July 21, 2020 -- For Immediate Release

Educators, parents, and health professionals are grappling with a new paradox created by COVID-19: how to make sure our students have access to fresh, healthy food at school given concerns around food safety and COVID-19.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food, a network of more than [128](#) health, education, Indigenous and environmental organizations from every [province and territory](#), **calls on provincial medical officers of health and local health and educational professionals to set guidelines for school food programs that balance COVID-19 safety with serving healthy meals rich in vegetables and fruit, as recommended by Canada's 2019 food guide.**

“We are concerned that as schools reopen in the fall, Ministry of Education and school board guidelines will require that school food programs limit fresh healthy food and instead serve packaged and pre-prepared food, which is often highly processed, contains additives and preservatives, is not in line with the recommendations in *Canada's Food Guide*, is often imported rather than produced in Canada, and can be much more expensive than fresh ingredients,” said Debbie Field, the Coalition’s Coordinator. “We are worried that schools will restrict students from cooking and growing their own food at school. We are also concerned that guidelines will limit community agencies, volunteers and parents, who are essential to making school food programs happen, from being allowed into schools.”

Prioritizing healthy food is possible and momentum is growing. [Read our blog](#) for examples from PEI, Newfoundland and Labrador, and BC where guidelines are being developed that focus on safely serving healthy food and allowing student and volunteer involvement in school food programs.

Only one-third of children aged four to 13 eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables, and a quarter of children’s caloric intake is from foods not recommended by even the 2007 edition of *Canada's Food Guide*.¹ A recent [survey](#) found that only 10% of youth in grades 6-12 met fruit and vegetable recommendations. [Media](#) are now reporting that COVID-19 has even exacerbated poor diets, leading to more pre-packaged and processed food being eaten than before.

We call on health and educational experts to develop school food policies that encourage healthy eating and youth engagement while being COVID-19 compliant. As in the case of community gardens, farmers’ markets, and many other services deemed essential, we are confident that it is possible to balance the serving of healthy food in schools with COVID-19-safe guidelines.

For more information, please connect with Debbie Field, Coalition for Healthy School Food Coordinator schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org, 416 537-6856.