



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Mark Johnson, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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Guidelines for Ensuring Health and Safety for School Nutrition Staff and Children and Families Receiving School Nutrition Services

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Many children in our state depend on the school setting to receive meals and our school nutrition programs are essential to address food insecurity in the community. Meals distributed during COVID-19 emergency-related school closures provide a lifeline to the state's most vulnerable, economically disadvantaged children and families. The safety of school nutrition staff and others involved in providing meals for children is a top priority. Social distancing and other rules of personal hygiene are critical to minimize the risk of exposure to both the staff and the children and families receiving meals.

To that end, the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) are issuing the following guidelines that school districts and school nutrition employees must follow to ensure the health and safety of both school employees and children and families. It is important to note that each school district and local health department may have different or more stringent requirements, instructions, guidance and recommendations for staff involved in providing meals to children and families. These guidelines are not intended to supersede policies from local authorities. The more stringent policies, whether state or local, should be followed.

These guidelines are in accordance with guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), the [NC Department of Health and Human Services \(DHHS\)](#) and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures required in School Nutrition operations. As facts surrounding the Pandemic continue to develop, state and federal authorities review and revise their guidance. Please periodically check CDC's and DHHS's websites for updates.

Guidelines on General Health for School Nutrition Programs

- Adults 65 and older, individuals who are immunocompromised, and people who have severe underlying chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease, asthma, diabetes, severe obesity (BMI of 40 or greater), chronic kidney disease who are undergoing dialysis, or liver disease seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness. Employers shall consider instructing these employees to stay home from work, if needed. Based on the ["Contagious Disease Policy to Address 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic"](#) approved by the State Board of Education on March 27, 2020, mandatory employees who cannot work because they are high risk and who have not been assigned alternate telework duties may receive up to 168 hours of paid [State of Emergency Leave](#) between April 1-30, 2020.

SCHOOL NUTRITION AND DISTRICT OPERATIONS DIVISIONS

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

- Employees shall only handle food when healthy. People who are coughing, feverish, short of breath, vomiting, have diarrhea or other symptoms of illness should not report to work.
- Employers shall check employees' health before each shift by asking if they have any of the symptoms, such as cough or fever. Employers may check staff temperatures. Employees with a temperature greater than 100.4 F shall stay home until they have had no fever for 3 days without the use of fever-reducing medications (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen).
- Employees should inform their supervisor if they have a sick family member at home or have come into contact with someone with a diagnosis of COVID-19.
- Employers shall contact their local health department for guidance and report any possible exposures or cases to them immediately.

Guidelines for Personal Hygiene for Employees

- Employers shall ensure bathrooms and other handwashing sinks are always stocked with soap and single-use paper towels.
- Employees shall wash hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice). Dry hands with a clean, single-use paper towel. Throw used paper towels into a lined trash can. In addition to usual handwashing, employees shall make sure to wash hands:
 - before and after preparing or eating meals and snacks;
 - after blowing noses, coughing, sneezing, or after contact with body fluids;
 - after toileting;
 - after storing delivered food and supply items; and
 - after taking out the trash.
- Employers shall provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at key points including: building and kitchen entrances/exits, check-in/participation roster stations, serving areas, and in transport vehicles.
- Employees should use alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol only if soap and water are not available.
- Employees shall avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth at all times.
- Employees shall cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into their elbow. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can and immediately wash hands with soap and water as described above.
- Employees are encouraged to keep multiple clean uniforms at work to change into as needed. Employees should consider bringing an additional change of clothes to wear home and should wash hands thoroughly before returning home.
- Consistent with School Nutrition Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures, employers should remind employees about procedures for proper glove use. Hands must be properly washed before putting on non-latex, single-use gloves. Always change gloves when they tear, before beginning a new task, every four hours when doing the same task, and after handling raw meat, fish, or poultry. Employees must also wear gloves, use utensils, or other methods to avoid bare-hand contact for all ready-to-eat foods. If the employee has a wound on hands, fingers, or arms, a single

use glove must be worn over an impermeable covering. When working with food and using hand antiseptics, use one that is Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) for use in contact with food.

- Employers are encouraged to supply, provide education on proper use, and encourage the use of cloth face coverings for employees who are not consistently able to maintain a six (6) foot distance from other employees, volunteers, children, and families, subject to the availability of these products. Please see [this information](#) from the CDC.

Guidelines for Meal Preparation Areas

- Employers shall establish work areas that promote proper social distancing.
 - Designate individual workstations at least six (6) feet apart.
 - When possible, use separate areas including the kitchen, dining room, hallway, or multipurpose room to minimize staff interaction.
 - Limit movement of staff from one work area to another. Consider defining entry and exit points and marking routes that allow at least six (6) feet of spacing in high-traffic work areas.
 - Consider utilizing multiple preparation sites to reduce the number of staff working together at one time. Meals from each preparation site can be transported to one location for distribution.
 - Create a separation of duties and restrict individuals not involved in meal preparation from preparation areas. This includes staff and others distributing or delivering meals, volunteers or other school personnel not involved in meal preparation, and children and families receiving meals.
 - Require vendors to leave all deliveries on the loading dock. Do not allow vendors to enter preparation areas. Retrieve deliveries immediately and store properly. Wash and dry hands as described above before and after storing delivered items.
- Employers should prepare to reduce the impact of employee illness on meal preparation.
 - Divide staff at each site into at least two (2) teams if feasible and schedule staffs so the teams are not working at the same time in the same location (i.e. A and B team schedules).
 - Prepare back-up preparation sites. In the event of illness and quarantine of one team, move the team not impacted by illness to the back-up site and continue the operation.
 - Utilize employees with essential cooking and preparation skills only in the preparation areas. Avoid using them in distribution areas.
- Employers shall expand routine cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting procedures.
 - Ensure an adequate supply of cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting supplies are maintained.
 - Utilize disinfectants approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19).
 - Frequently clean and sanitize food contact surfaces and clean and disinfect other high-touch surfaces (i.e. preparation tables, utensils, serving areas/tables, transport vehicles, cold and hot holding equipment used for transporting food,

doorknobs, oven/refrigerator/freezer/hot holding cabinet handles, and light switches, etc.).

- Clean the interior of buses used to transport meals regularly by following local cleaning procedures and using approved products. It is important to keep the bus clean by sweeping, removing trash and cleaning spills daily. As extra precaution, perform a deeper clean especially on high human touch points such as steering wheel, gear stick, seat belt buckles, door handles, railings, etc. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly with an EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses.
- Follow regular cleaning protocols and use an [EPA-registered disinfectant that is active against coronaviruses](#) according to the directions on the label. Food contact surfaces must be sanitized with product labeled as safe for use on food contact surfaces.

Guidelines for Meal Distribution Areas

- Distribution areas shall be set up so that employees, children, and families are able to limit contact while meals are being distributed. Strategies for limiting contact include:
 - Distribute meals outdoors. Plan for inclement weather.
 - Avoid physical contact with children, families, and other staff.
 - Provide meals for multiple days (no more than seven (7) days) at one time, when possible. Properly label meals with storage and reheating instructions as well as discard date.
 - Use additional measures to block the spread of respiratory droplets that may contain the virus.
 - Clear, physical barriers, such as acrylic or plastic, may be put up to separate school nutrition employees and children and families receiving meals.
 - Utilize School Resource Officers or Law Enforcement for crowd control and to ensure social distancing during meal distribution.
 - Do not allow hugs, handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, elbow bumps or other methods of physical contact that would increase risk for infection.
 - As meals are transported to meal distribution areas or vehicles for transport, avoid cross-contamination from touching door handles and other frequent contact surfaces and then touching food or food packaging.
- Distribution areas shall be equipped with cleaning and sanitation supplies, hand sanitizer, and cleaning products for cleaning surfaces. Employees shall use hand sanitizer as necessary during meal distribution.
- Prior to and following meal distribution, all surfaces, tables, carts, equipment, coolers, transport bags, and transport vehicles must be properly cleaned and disinfected.
- School districts are encouraged to implement the following strategies for meal distribution depending on the distribution location.
 - Curbside/other Pick-up Locations:
 - Provide instructions to families on protocol for meal pick-up to maintain social distancing and safety.
 - Post signage with instructions at curbside or other pick-up locations.

- Mark locations for people waiting for meals to stand at least six (6) feet apart or more by using tape, chalk, temporary spray paint, rope, or cones.
 - Place meals on tables or carts to promote no contact pick up. Only the food intended for one family should be placed on the table or cart at a time.
 - Ensure families only touch meals intended for them.
- Drive-thru Locations:
 - Provide instructions to families on protocol for meal pick-up to maintain social distancing and safety.
 - Post signage with instructions at drive-thru locations.
 - Maintain a safe distance from families when identifying the number of meals needed. Do not lean on vehicles or reach into windows.
 - Ask families to write the number of meals needed on a piece of paper or sign and display this for staff to see as families approach the drive-thru.
 - Instruct families to pop open the trunk for staff to place meals into the vehicle instead of handing meals directly to a person inside the vehicle.
 - Use tables, carts, or reach and grab tools to create distance and promote no contact hand-off of meals. Only the food intended for one family should be placed on the table or cart at a time.
 - Ensure recipients only touch meals intended for their family.
- Delivery by Yellow Bus or Other Transport
 - Options for Door-to-Door Delivery:
 - Ask families to write the number of meals needed on a sign placed on a door, window, or chair.
 - Drop off meals at least six (6) feet away from the person receiving the meal.
 - Do not allow children or families to enter the bus or vehicle used to deliver meals.
 - Leave food on the front porch or doorstep.
 - Put meals into coolers or containers left at the end of driveways.
 - Determine a method for notifying families when meals are left on the front porch, doorstep or in coolers to ensure meals are picked up by intended family and consumed or properly stored within a safe time-frame.
 - Delivery to One/Multiple Locations for Pick-Up
 - Stop at one location in a neighborhood instead of making multiple stops. Target areas with multiple dwellings close by (apartments, mobile home parks, public housing areas, etc.).
 - Create a delivery window or schedule and inform families of pick-up times.
 - Do not allow children or families to enter the bus or vehicle used to deliver meals.
 - Establish a mechanism or set up at locations to achieve at least six (6) feet of social distancing while distributing meals.

- Mark locations for people waiting for meals to stand at least six (6) feet apart or more by using tape, chalk, temporary spray paint, rope, or cones.
- Ensure recipients only touch meals intended for their family.

Guidelines for When an Employee is Sick

- As mentioned earlier, employees with a temperature greater than 100.4 F shall stay home until they have had no fever for 3 days without the use of fever-reducing medications (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen).
- Individuals who have had close contact (e.g., household member) with a person with respiratory illness shall stay at home and monitor themselves for symptoms (i.e. fever, cough, shortness of breath), limit outside interaction as much as possible, and self-isolate if he/she develops symptoms. Individuals should monitor for the development of symptoms for 14 days following the last date of exposure to the ill person while that person was sick.
- Anyone suspected to have or diagnosed with COVID-19 should remain isolated at home until at least 7 days after symptom onset AND ≥ 72 hours (three (3) full days) after symptom resolution (absence of fever without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement in respiratory symptoms), whichever is longer.
- If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, the school district shall do the following:
 - Notify their local health department that an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
 - Employees who were in close contact with the infected employee should be isolated in accordance with the guidelines above.
 - In coordination with the local health department, the school district should institute a thorough cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting of the site where the employee was working in accordance with [CDC](#) and [NC DHHS recommendations](#).

Additional Strategies for Staffing and Procurement

- Designate an individual to coordinate volunteers, community groups and other vendors.
- Reach out to other groups to help with distributing meals, including:
 - School Resource Officers
 - Community partners
 - Restaurants, caterers, food trucks, and other delivery services
- Provide school staff, vendors, community partners and volunteers with training on proper meal distribution strategies and safety best practices.
- Request assistance from Maintenance or Career and Technical Education staff to create physical barriers or other mechanisms to maintain distance between staff and children and families during meal distribution.
- Request assistance from school nurses and other health professionals to assess the health status of employees, vendors, community partners and volunteers involved with meal preparation or distribution.