



# BC School Food Guidelines

For Food & Beverages in K-12 Schools

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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## Overview

The Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. Schools (the Guidelines) have been developed to support healthy food environments at school by increasing access to healthy food while limiting access to unhealthy food. Through food programs, cafeterias, vending machines, fundraisers and more, schools provide many of the meals, snacks and beverages students consume in a day. Providing nutritious foods to students at school supports their learning, mental well-being, and healthy growth and development.

“Food” is used throughout this document as the umbrella term for both foods and beverages

Research shows that eating healthy food and beverages:

- Provides students with fuel for optimal growth and nutrients for strong bones, teeth and muscles
- Helps students’ brains develop
- Improves school performance, learning ability, attention span and behaviour
- Supplies energy for daily activity
- Reduces the risk of getting sick now and developing chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer later in life
- Sets the foundation for healthy eating behaviours as adults

The Guidelines provide a voluntary set of best practices aimed at supporting schools as they work towards the gold standards while providing room for flexibility to support each school’s unique needs and operational circumstances.

The first set of Guidelines were published by the B.C. Ministries of Education and Health in 2005. The Guidelines were updated in 2008, 2011, and 2013. With the release of Canada’s food guide in 2019, the Guidelines have been revised to reflect current national<sup>1</sup> and provincial nutrition recommendations<sup>2</sup> and school administrator survey results on implementation challenges with the 2013 Guidelines.<sup>3</sup>

Notable changes from the 2013 Guidelines compared to the 2022 BC School Food Guidelines for Food & Beverages in K-12 Schools include:

2013 GUIDELINES	2022 GUIDELINES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applied to food and beverages sold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applies to food and beverages sold, offered, or served</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provided the minimum nutrition standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides the gold standard for nutrition</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mandated policy for public schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Guidelines for K-12 schools in BC</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nutrient-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food-based</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 categories – sell most, sell sometimes, do not sell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 categories – foods to offer, sell, or serve and foods to avoid</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific guidance for elementary and secondary schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Same guidance for elementary and secondary schools</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encouraged to use the Guidelines within student education on food and nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourages using <b>Teach Food First (not the Guidelines)</b> within student education on food and nutrition</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Canada’s Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers. January 2019. Available from: [CDG-EN-2018.pdf \(canada.ca\)](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/cdg-en-2018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Provincial/Territorial Guidance Document: Nutrition Standards for K-12 Schools. March 2021. Internal document.

<sup>3</sup> 2020 K-12 Public School Food Survey Final Report. BC Stats. March 2020. Prepared for the Ministries of Education, Health, and Agriculture. Internal document.

### Who should use the Guidelines?

The Guidelines are for adults making food decisions on behalf of students in a school setting. This includes not only administrators and teachers, but also parents and Parent Advisory Councils hosting fundraising events or hot lunch programs and food service staff serving or selling snacks and meals including school food programs. The food and beverage industry also uses the Guidelines so it can provide options to schools that meet the nutrition standards. The Guidelines are not intended to support student food and nutrition education (see [Teach Food First](#)).

The 2022 Guidelines apply to:

- School vending machines, stores and cafeterias
- All school food programs
- School/parent organized food and beverages offered, sold, or served at:
  - lunch sales
  - fun fairs, sporting events and field trips (on and off-campus)
  - fundraisers and bake sales
- Food and beverages brought to school by students, parents, or teachers, to share with other students (e.g., classroom celebrations)

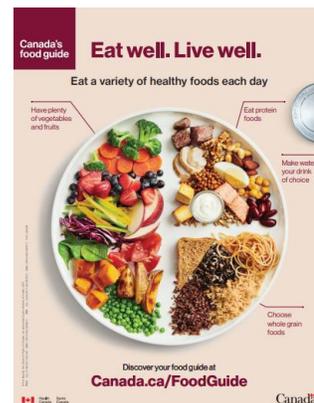
The 2022 Guidelines do **not** apply to:

- Foods brought from home for personal consumption (e.g., bagged lunches from home)
- Food and beverages sold, offered or served only to adults
- Food and beverages prepared by students as part of class projects

## Providing meals

The following general Guidelines apply when schools offer, serve or sell meals to students:

- ❖ Offer a variety of healthy foods: follow a meal plan that provides a wide range of foods that meet the Guidelines identified within this document. Foods offered should consider student preferences and be inclusive of cultural backgrounds.
- ❖ Cultivate eating competence and positive relationships with food by providing students autonomy to decide how much they want to eat and where possible, letting students select and/or serve their own food and beverages from those offered at mealtimes.
- ❖ Offer at least two vegetable or fruit options at breakfast. Offer at least one kind of vegetable and one kind of fruit OR two kinds of vegetables at lunch and supper (see Vegetables and Fruits section below). Offer at least one grain option at each meal [see (Whole) Grain Foods section below].
- ❖ Offer at least one protein food option at each meal (see Protein Foods section below). Beverages that contain protein (i.e., milk, fortified soy beverage or kefir) are to be provided in **addition to** the protein food offered.
- ❖ In addition to water, offer at least one beverage that is an excellent source of calcium (at least 25% Daily Value for calcium) and is fortified with vitamin D (at least 10% Daily Value) at all meals provided, such as:
  - Plain (unsweetened) milk (0-2% MF)
  - Plain (unsweetened) kefir (0-2% MF)
  - Plain (original or unsweetened) fortified plant-based beverages



## Preparing Food from Scratch

Preparing food from scratch (e.g., cooking, baking, blending) includes food items, meals or baked goods prepared from scratch using single food ingredients **within the school setting**. If preparing a dish based on package directions (e.g., adding milk to a pre-packaged powdered sauce), reheating a pre-prepared food, or preparing a baked item based on package directions (e.g., browning par-baked buns), go to *Mixed Dishes* or the individual food categories as appropriate to assess.

As cooking more often and limiting highly processed foods are foundational recommendations within Canada's food guide, general principles only are provided. It is intended that food and beverages prepared within the school setting will follow the general principles, contain healthier ingredients, and minimize added sodium, sugars, and saturated fat to ensure nutritious foods are offered and available to students.

### General principles

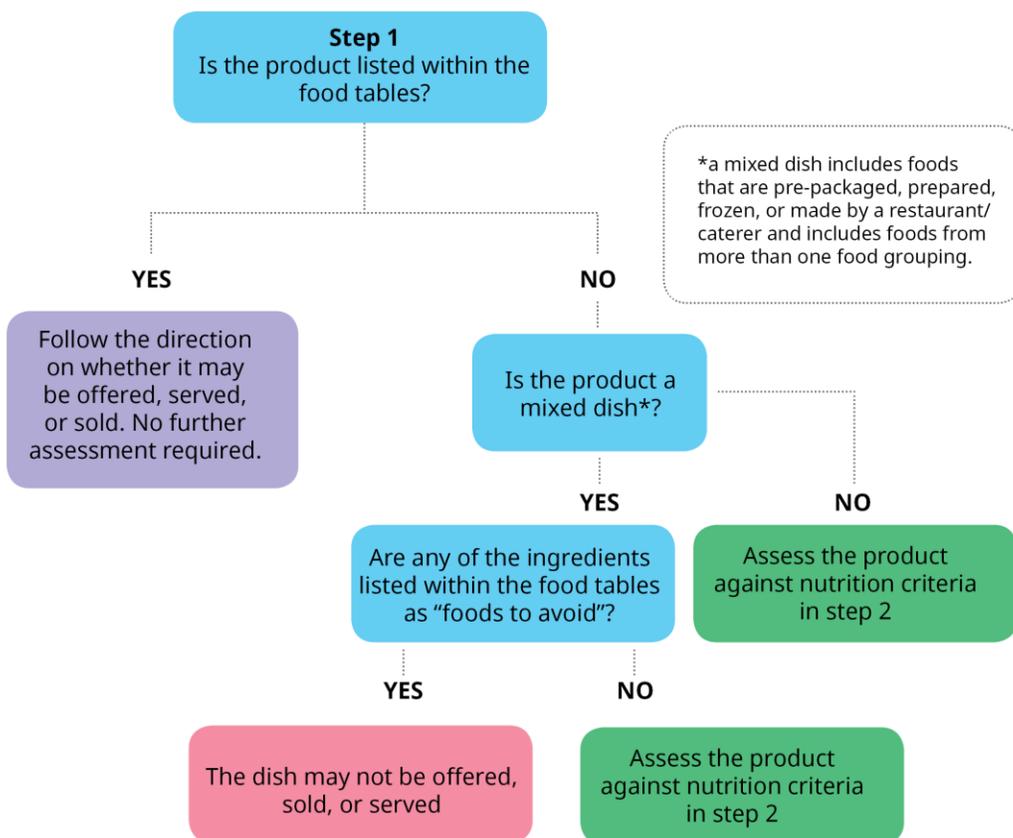
- ❖ Preparing food from scratch is encouraged when/where feasible to support healthy eating and limit the offering of highly processed food.
- ❖ All of the Guidelines listed within this document should be applied when preparing food from scratch:
  - Ingredients listed in the Guidelines as "Foods to avoid" should not be used when preparing food from scratch

- Cookies, bars (e.g., brownies), pastries, croissants, cakes (including cupcakes and cake pops), pies, tarts, donuts, sweet buns (e.g., cinnamon buns), candies and fudge should not be offered, served or sold (either baked from scratch or pre-prepared)
- Commercially processed meat (meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermenting, smoking or other processes to enhance flavour or improve preservation<sup>4</sup>) should not be used when cooking or baking.
- This does not apply to traditional meats, fish and other traditional foods that are prepared using Indigenous methods and are part of traditional food systems. Traditional foods are encouraged to be offered and shared within school settings. Deep-frying should not be used.
- ❖ As per Canada's food guide, preparing meals and snacks with ingredients that have little to no added sodium, sugars or saturated fat is encouraged:
  - Where possible, select lower sodium varieties of products (e.g., canned tomato sauce/paste, soup, stock, broth, salt-free spices and seasonings) and use lower sodium recipes.
  - Use recipes with reduced amounts of sugars (e.g., sugars, honey, syrups, molasses).
  - Do not use [sugary drinks](#), including 100% fruit juice in recipes. Use whole or cut vegetables and fruits instead of juice.
  - Use recipes with only small amounts or less of products high in [saturated fat](#) (e.g., cream, butter, cheese, fatty meats, lard, ghee, coconut oil, palm kernel oil and coconut milk). Choose recipes that use ingredients with [healthy fats](#) instead of saturated fat where possible.
  - Use whole grain flour when available. If not available, whole wheat flour is recommended. Enriched white flour may be used when needed, shifting towards using whole grain or whole wheat flour more often.
- ❖ Condiments may be offered in small quantities to accompany meals. Where possible, offer lower sodium (e.g., soy sauce) and lower saturated fat (e.g., sour cream) varieties.

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015 [cited 13 Jan 2021]. [Q&A on the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat.](#)

## Process for determining whether a food or beverage may be offered, served, or sold



### Step 2 Nutrition Criteria

The product must meet **all three** criteria to be offered, sold or served.

How is product offered, sold or served?	% Daily Value Saturated + Trans Fat	% Daily Value Sugars	% Daily Value Sodium
As an entrée/main meal	Less than 30%	Less than 30%	Less than 30%
As a side dish, snack or an ingredient	Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%
As a vegetable or fruit, protein food, (whole) grain food, or beverage	Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

## Food Tables

### Vegetables and Fruits

#### General principles

- ❖ Offer a variety of vegetables and fruits on the days when food is offered or sold. Offer at least two vegetable or fruit options at breakfast. Offer at least one kind of vegetable and one kind of fruit OR two kinds of vegetables at lunch and supper (see Vegetables and Fruits section). Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruits can all be healthy options.
- ❖ Moving towards offering dark green vegetables as often as possible (i.e., daily where feasible) and orange vegetables regularly (i.e., a few times per week where feasible) is encouraged.
- ❖ When using pre-packaged or pre-prepared vegetables and fruits, select products without added sugars, salt (sodium), pre-made breading or rich sauces/spreads when possible.

Step 1: Search for the food within the table below. If the food is listed, follow the direction of whether it may be offered, served or sold. If the food is not within the table below, go to step 2.

Foods to offer, serve, or sell	Foods to avoid
<b>VEGETABLES AND FRUITS</b>	
Fresh vegetables and fruits Frozen vegetables and fruits Canned vegetables Canned fruits (packed in juice) Fruit sauces (100% fruit with no added sugar, e.g., unsweetened apple sauce) Dried fruits (100% fruit with no added sugar) - to be served with meals only	Canned fruits in heavy syrup Battered and/or deep-fried vegetables Par-fried French fries (non par-fried, pre-cut potatoes may be offered) Chips (regular, baked or extruded), including potato chips, corn chips, tortilla chips, veggie chips Fruit cups in gelatin/jelly Prepared pie filling Processed fruit snacks (e.g., fruit leathers, fruit bars and gummies, including those made with 100% fruit juice) Frozen fruit bars, popsicles or fruit-based freezies Products that are deep-fried or contain sugar substitutes, caffeine or natural health products

Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts table on the product label to determine if the product meets the following criteria. If it meets **all three** criteria, then it may be offered, served or sold. If it exceeds one or more criteria, then it may not.

Saturated + Trans Fat % Daily Value	Sugars % Daily Value	Sodium % Daily Value
Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

## (Whole) Grain Foods

### General principles

- ❖ Offer whole grain products regularly if/when possible based on availability and cultural considerations of the student population.
- ❖ If offering refined grains, moving towards replacing them with whole grains as often as possible is encouraged. If whole grains are not available, recommend choosing whole wheat options over refined grains when possible (e.g., bread).
- ❖ When using pre-packaged or pre-prepared grain products, select products without added sugars, salt (sodium) or rich sauces/spreads when possible.

School food providers are encouraged to move towards offering, serving, and selling more whole grain foods. For ideas on serving whole grains, see x resource (to be developed).

Step 1: Search for the food within the table below. If the food is listed, follow the direction of whether may be offered, served or sold. If the food is not within the table below, go to step 2.

Foods to offer, serve, or sell	Foods to avoid
<b>(WHOLE) GRAIN FOODS</b>	
Whole grains such as barley, rye, whole oats or oatmeal (unsweetened), bulgur, quinoa, buckwheat, amaranth, millet Whole grain (or 100% whole wheat) bread products (bread, bagels, tortilla wraps, pitas, buns, bannock, naan, pizza crust, flatbread etc.) Whole grain brown rice or wild rice, plain Whole grain noodles/pasta, plain	Cookies, bars (e.g., brownies), pastries, croissants, cakes (including cupcakes and cake pops), pies, tarts, donuts or sweet buns (e.g. cinnamon buns) Pre-seasoned noodles/pasta or rice Canned rice or pasta Coated granola bars (e.g. covered in chocolate, “yogurt” etc.) or puffed rice cereal bars Energy bars, protein bars Toaster pastries Cheesies, puffs, twists, crisps, straws, pretzels (regular, baked or extruded) Products that are deep-fried or contain sugar substitutes, caffeine or natural health products Sugary breakfast cereals (refined grains low in fibre with added sugar, colour, and flavour)

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Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts table on the product label to determine if the product meets the following criteria. If it meets **all three** criteria, then it may be offered, served or sold. If it exceeds one or more criteria, then it may not.

Saturated + Trans Fat % Daily Value	Sugars % Daily Value	Sodium % Daily Value
Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

## Protein Foods

### General principles

- ❖ Offer plant-based protein foods regularly if/when possible based on availability and cultural considerations of the student population.
- ❖ Do not offer, serve or sell commercially processed meat (meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermenting, smoking or other processes to enhance flavour or improve preservation).
  - This does not apply to traditional meats, fish and other traditional foods that are prepared using Indigenous methods and are part of traditional food systems. Traditional foods are encouraged to be offered and shared within school settings.

School food providers are encouraged to move towards offering, serving, and selling more plant-based proteins. For ideas on providing plant-based proteins, see x resource (to be developed)

Step 1: Search for the food within the table below. If the food is listed, follow the direction of whether it may be offered, served or sold. If the food is not within the table below, go to step 2.

Foods to offer, serve, or sell	Foods to avoid
<b>PROTEIN FOODS</b>	
Fresh/canned/dried legumes (beans, peas, lentils) Hummus Eggs Tofu, tempeh Fresh/frozen/ chicken, turkey Fresh/frozen lean beef and pork Wild game* Extra lean or lean ground meat (e.g., chicken, turkey, beef, pork) Fresh/frozen fish and shellfish Canned fish Hard cheese Cottage cheese Plain (unsweetened) yogurt (0-2% MF) Plain (unsweetened and unsalted) nuts, seeds, nut butters and seed butters**	Commercially battered and/or breaded meat, fish, chicken, turkey (e.g., chicken nuggets, chicken strips) Deli meats (e.g., bologna, pepperoni, salami, ham) Hot dogs, wieners Bacon Sausages, pork breakfast links Corned beef Beef jerky Processed cheese – spread, slices or sauce Ice cream, frozen yogurt, frozen dessert Milkshakes (homemade or pre-packaged) Pudding Products that are deep-fried or contain sugar substitutes, caffeine or natural health products

\*As approved by local Environmental Health Officer

\*\*Dependent on school food allergy policies

Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts table on the product label to determine if the product meets the following criteria. If it meets **all three** criteria, then it may be offered, served or sold. If it exceeds one or more criteria, then it may not.

Saturated + Trans Fat % Daily Value	Sugars % Daily Value	Sodium % Daily Value
Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

The gold standard is to not offer, serve or sell commercially processed meat within the school setting, including all deli meats (cold cuts). However, it is acknowledged that this significantly limits options for providing sandwiches/subs which may not be feasible for some schools. If this is the case, schools may consider using deli meats lower in saturated fat and/or sodium such as turkey, chicken, and roast beef on a limited/infrequent basis. For more information, see x resource (to be developed).

## Beverages

### General principles

- ❖ Ensure easy access to safe, clean drinking water at all times.
- ❖ In addition to water, offer at least one beverage that is an excellent source of calcium (at least 25% Daily Value) and is fortified with vitamin D (at least 10% Daily Value) at all meals provided, such as:
  - Plain (unsweetened) milk (0-2% MF)
  - Plain (unsweetened) kefir (0-2% MF)
  - Plain (original or unsweetened) fortified plant-based beverages
- ❖ Do not offer sugary drinks in the school setting. [Sugary drinks](#) include soft drinks, fruit-flavoured drinks, 100% fruit juice, flavoured waters with added sugars, sport and energy drinks, and other sweetened hot or cold beverages, such as iced tea, cold coffee beverages, sweetened milks, and sweetened plant-based beverages.

Step 1: Search for the beverage within the table below. If the beverage is listed, follow the direction of whether it may be offered, served or sold. If the beverage is not within the table below, go to step 2.

Beverages to offer, serve, or sell	Beverages to avoid
<b>BEVERAGES</b>	
Water Unsweetened carbonated or still water Plain (unsweetened) milk (0-2% MF) Plain yogurt drinks Plain (unsweetened) kefir (0-2% MF) Plain (original or unsweetened) fortified plant-based beverages	Soft drinks Fruit-flavoured drinks (e.g., lemonade) 100% fruit juice, fruit-flavoured drinks, cocktails, punch Flavoured waters with added sugars Sport/electrolyte replacement drinks Energy drinks Coffee, black tea (including iced tea, cold coffee beverages) Hot chocolate Sweetened milk Sweetened flavoured plant-based beverages (“original” may be offered) Milkshakes Slushy drinks Vitamin fortified water Beverages containing sugar substitutes, added caffeine or natural health products

Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts table on the product label to determine if the product meets the following criteria. If it meets **all three** criteria, then it may be offered, served or sold. If it exceeds one or more criteria, then it may not.

Saturated + Trans Fat % Daily Value	Sugars % Daily Value	Sodium % Daily Value
Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

The gold standard is to not offer sugary drinks within the school setting which includes sweetened milks and sweetened flavoured plant-based beverages. However, calcium and vitamin D are critical nutrients that children often do not get enough of. If plain milk, kefir, yogurt drinks or fortified plant-based beverages are not well accepted, a school food provider may consider also offering lightly sweetened versions of these beverages.

**Milk, kefir, and yogurt drinks:** 0-2% milk fat, no more than 20%\* Daily Value sugars

**Fortified plant-based beverages:** no more than 9% Daily Value sugars, at least 25% Daily Value calcium, at least 10% Daily Value vitamin D

\*higher % Daily Value for sugar due to naturally occurring sugar (lactose)

## Mixed Dishes

Mixed dishes include foods that are pre-packaged, prepared frozen or made by a restaurant/caterer and include foods from **more than one** food grouping [Vegetables and Fruits, (Whole) Grain Foods and Protein Foods].

Step 1: Review each of the food categories to ensure the product does not include any foods listed within the Guidelines as “Foods to avoid”.

Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts table on the product label to determine if the product meets the following criteria. If it meets **all three** criteria, then it may be offered, served or sold. If it exceeds one or more criteria, then it may not.

How product is offered, served or sold	Saturated + Trans Fat % Daily Value	Sugars % Daily Value	Sodium % Daily Value
<b>As an entrée/main meal</b>	Less than 30%	Less than 30%	Less than 30%
<b>As a side dish or snack</b>	Less than 15%	Less than 15%	Less than 15%

## Other Foods

Search for the food within the table below. If the food is listed, follow the direction of whether it may be offered, served or sold.

Foods to offer, serve, or sell	Foods to avoid
<b>CONFECTIONERY</b>	
	Chocolate (bars or candies) Fudge Sweetened gelatin/jellied desserts Whipped cream or whipped dessert topping Frozen treats, freeze pops Candy Gum Products that are deep-fried or contain sugar substitutes, caffeine or natural health products
<b>CONDIMENTS</b>	
Condiments may be offered in small quantities to accompany meals. Where possible, offer lower sodium (e.g., soy sauce) and lower saturated fat (e.g., sour cream) varieties.	