

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for School Food Service Professionals

This document will discuss various questions that have been asked to the Department as school kitchens prepare to reopen for the school year and will differentiate between what is required in the Nebraska food code and the Nebraska Pure Food Act, and what are recommended best practices to minimize spread of the COVID-19 virus. Also provided are links to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) websites that have additional recommendations and guidance, please check links regularly as they may be updated

1. Are masks required?

Masks are strongly recommended, but not required. Check with your local jurisdictions for any ordinances on masks. The CDC and FDA both recommend the use of cloth face coverings especially when physical distancing (6 feet of space) is unable to be maintained.

FDA Recommendation: The use of cloth face coverings in the work environment should be used in addition to other control measures, including engineering controls such as implementing social distance practices and physical partitions or barriers; and administrative controls such as frequent cleaning and disinfection protocols.

Hand hygiene and face coverings:

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after putting on, touching, or removing masks or cloth face coverings.

2. Are homemade masks required to be 3 layers?

While there's no requirement on layers of cloth masks, the CDC recommends MULTIPLE LAYERS. Scientific studies are being completed daily and guidance may change. For the most current recommendations please refer to the CDC website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

Current CDC guidance regarding cloth face coverings is as follows:

Make sure your cloth face covering:

- Fits snugly but comfortably against the side of the face,
- Completely covers the nose and mouth,
- Is secured with ties or ear loops,
- Includes multiple layers of fabric,

- Allows for breathing without restriction, and
- Can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

3. Where should lunch be served? Classroom or cafeteria?

The CDC recommends serving food in classrooms instead of the cafeteria or to have children eat meals outdoors, when feasible. It also states that if communal dining halls or cafeterias are used, schools should encourage social distancing in food service lines and at tables while eating. The Department recommends creating a path that minimizes contact/interactions with others not wearing masks when walking between the serving area and the classroom or other lunch room.

4. Are trays required to be covered when students are carrying their trays to a classroom or walk by others not wearing a mask?

No, the trays are not required to be covered.

5. Can I have a salad bar?

Nebraska's Directed Health Measures (DHM) prohibit self-serve salad bars/buffets in restaurants and bars for all counties in Phases 1-3. Phase 4 (GREEN) recommends not using self-serve items, such as salad bars. Please refer to your local DHM for your county for the most up-to-date information at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Directed-Health-Measures.aspx> . Self-service is highly discouraged unless items offered on the salad bar are pre-portioned, pre-packaged, or served.

CDC Recommendation: Schools should avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as hot and cold food bars, salad or condiment bars, and drink stations.

FDA Recommendation: Discontinuing operations, such as salad bars, buffets, and beverage service stations that require customers to use common utensils or dispensers.

6. Can I save pre-portioned or prepackaged salad bar items that were not sold?

Pre-portioned or prepackaged TCS (Temperature Control for Safety) foods (i.e. leafy greens, cut tomatoes, cut melon) must be held 41 degrees or lower and dated if they are to be saved.

7. Should milk and juice be handed out or can students get their own?

Milk or juice should be served to students or grab-and-go/pre-portioned/pre-packaged and packages be separated enough for students to avoid touching multiple items. For schools in Phase 4 of the DHM, it is still highly recommended to continue this practice.

CDC Recommendation: Schools should avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as hot and cold food bars, salad or condiment bars, and drink stations.

8. Can a teacher dispense water into a glass for the students to drink at lunch?

Yes. The teacher must be wearing gloves while serving the water and a mask is recommended.

9. Can we reuse prepackaged food items that have not been opened like milk or grab-and-go items?

Yes. If the pre-packaged items were never sold to a student and proper holding temperatures were maintained while the food was displayed, they may be used again. This is already the standard. However, if the items have been in the possession of a student re-using or re-selling is not permitted. **(Nebraska Food Code Reference 3-306.14)** If a school elects to have a share table, where pre-packaged items or thick rind fruits are redistributed, the Department recommends they consult with the Nebraska Department of Education on the proper procedures.

10. What if our school can't implement the recommended guidance for self-service operations such as salad bars, milk, juice, and water stations?

Please contact your food inspector or local health department for additional guidance or suggestions in accordance with current local DHMs

11. What about second servings?

Second servings must be provided on a clean plate and NEVER re-served on the same plate. This is already a required practice. **(Nebraska Food Code Reference 3-304.16)**

12. What about water stations?

Self-serve water bottle refill stations are not recommended unless they are touchless.

13. Can parents bring in treats to be served with breakfast or lunch?

School kitchens are not allowed to serve treats/food items brought in by parents as part of the prepared school breakfast or lunch program.

- There are specific USDA nutritional guidelines that must be followed.
- School kitchens are required to follow the Nebraska Food Code which states: "Food prepared in a private home may not be used or offered for human consumption in a food establishment." **(Nebraska Food Code Reference 3-201.11(B)).**

Parents who want to bring in treats/food items into the school should follow their school's policy regarding outside food and drink.

14. What is the best sanitizer? Bleach or Quat?

Both types of chemical sanitizers are approved as long as they are used as directed.

15. Should we **SANITIZE** or **DISINFECT** cafeteria lunch tables between groups of students?

The CDC recommends that Schools **clean and DISINFECT food line areas, tables, and chairs between uses.**

When disinfectants are used on food contact surfaces, like cafeteria table tops, they must be used as directed. Most disinfectants that allow for use on food contact surfaces require a potable water rinse. All disinfectants are different, USE AS DIRECTED.

Guidance for choosing a disinfectant:

- Read the label.
- Determine if it is a product that **meets EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2 external icon**. Check here: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>
- Determine if the product can be used on FOOD CONTACT SURFACES.
 - If yes, use as directed.
 - If no, find a different EPA approved disinfectant that may be used on food contact surfaces.
- Diluted Household bleach must be prepared according to the manufacturer's label for disinfection.
- Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol and are appropriate for the surface may be used.

16. My dish machine uses heat to sanitize, is that acceptable or do I need a chemical sanitizer?

As long as heat sanitizing dish machines are maintaining proper wash, rinse, and final sanitizing temperatures, this is acceptable and a chemical sanitizer is not needed unless recommended by the manufacture.

Recommendations for ensuring sanitizer levels are maintained during service for dish machines and manual dish washing operations:

- **Manual dish washing with a chemical sanitizer:** Wash, rinse, and sanitize. Reminder: Sanitizing is always the last step. Check chemical sanitizer levels regularly (every hour or more frequently) to ensure proper concentration levels are maintained.
- **Manual dish washing with hot water as the sanitizer:** Water temperatures must be maintained at 171 F or higher.
- **Dish machines using chemical sanitizers:** Verify that wash and rinse temperatures dishes are correct. Check chemical sanitizers with test strips at least once each shift or more frequently. RECOMMEND using the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) based **Food Contact Surfaces Cleaning and Sanitizing Log**.
- **Dish machines using heat as a sanitizer:** Verify that wash and rinse temperatures are correct. Sanitizing temperatures must be verified by testing with a waterproof thermometer capable of recording the highest temperature OR heat test strips.
- **Strongly recommend** implementing a HACCP based **Food Contact Surfaces Cleaning and Sanitizing Log** for all dish washing and all other food contact surface

sanitizing. The log may be downloaded under the "FOOD SAFETY SOP LOGS" heading at the following web address: <https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/food-safety>

HACCP Logs/Documentation Reminder

Required HACCP logs:

- Cooking and Reheating Temperature Log for Kitchens that Prepare and Serve Food Onsite
- Cooking and Reheating Temperature Log for Kitchens that Prepare Food for Delivery
- Cooling Log
- Damaged or Discarded Product Log
- Refrigeration Log
- Thermometer Calibration Log

Logs may be downloaded at the following address:

<https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/nslp/hazard-analysis-and-critical-control-point/#1566417146655-d41c7a65-7edc>

Recommended additional HACCP logs during COVID-19:

1. Food Contact Surfaces Cleaning and Sanitizing Log

Logs may be downloaded at the following address:

<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/food-safety>

Things to remember about WEARING GLOVES:

- Wash hands BEFORE and AFTER the use of disposable gloves,
- Wear gloves when PREPARING and SERVING ready-to-eat foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, sandwiches, and salads,
- Change gloves frequently and BETWEEN TASKS,
- Never handle money and food while wearing the same gloves,
- Change gloves AFTER sneezing, wiping nose, touching hair, TOUCHING CELL PHONE, or other contact with germs,
- Never re-use gloves,
- Never wash gloves. Dispose of them and get a new pair, and
- Dispose of soiled gloves after use.

USDA poster on glove use may be found here: <https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/glove-use.pdf>

17. Our school caters for our Child Development Center/child care/another school – They come to our kitchen to pick up the meals. How should we get the delivery to them?

Recommendation: Establish a pick-up zone for deliveries. Practice social distancing. Wear a mask or cloth face covering. Additional considerations may need to be taken depending on location.

Best Practices for Food Pick-up/Delivery Services During the COVID 19 Pandemic may be found at the following web address: <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/best-practices-retail-food-stores-restaurants-and-food-pick-updelivery-services-during-covid-19>

18. What about food pick-up and delivery/satellite locations?

From FDA best practices (full document may be found at <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/best-practices-retail-food-stores-restaurants-and-food-pick-updelivery-services-during-covid-19>)

- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting within the vehicle by wiping down surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Practice social distancing when delivering food, e.g., offering “no touch” deliveries and sending text alerts or calling when deliveries have arrived.
- Routinely clean and sanitize coolers and insulated bags used to deliver foods.

19. Can we still use student helpers?

Yes, provided they follow all of the same food safety procedures as paid cafeteria staff.

20. Is there a recommended way to accept payments?

CDC Recommendations:

- Move the electronic payment terminal/credit card reader farther away from the cashier in order to increase the distance between the customer and the cashier, if possible.
- Encourage customers to use touchless payment options, when available. Minimize handling cash, credit cards, reward cards, and mobile devices, where possible.
- When exchanging paper and coin money:
 - Do not touch your face afterward,
 - Ask customers to place cash on the counter rather than directly into your hand,
 - Place money directly on the counter when providing change back to customers, and
 - Wipe counter between each customer at checkout.

Schools who have previously had students enter an account number on a keypad for lunch payment, we recommend having the student verbally relay their number to the cashier.

We strongly recommend that cashiers wear masks and gloves during service.

For additional guidance about specific scenarios related to any of these topics, contact your inspector or local health department.