

What You Need To Know About The School Food And Beverage Policy

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/faqs.html>

FAQ on the new Nutrition Standards for Schools

Q. Why has the government released a school food and beverage policy?

A. The government passed the *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act* in April 2008 to make schools healthier places for students to learn.

We want to create an environment where the healthiest choices are the easiest choices for students to make.

This policy is an important step in enhancing students' health. It reinforces the knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding healthy eating developed through the Ontario curriculum. The policy will also help reduce students' risks of developing serious, chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.

Q. What does this policy mean for schools?

A. All food and beverages sold in schools for school purposes must meet the nutrition standards set out in the policy. This includes food and beverages sold in all venues (e.g., cafeterias, vending machines, tuck shops), through all programs (e.g., catered lunch programs), and at all events (e.g., bake sales, sports events).

Q. Are there any exemptions?

A. The standards do not apply to food and beverages that are:

- offered in schools to students at no cost;
- brought from home or purchased off school premises and are not for resale in schools;
- available for purchase during field trips off school premises;
- sold in schools for non-school purposes (e.g., sold by an outside organization that is using the gymnasium after school hours for a non-school-related event);
- sold for fundraising activities that occur off school premises;
- sold in staff rooms.

Q. When does this change take effect?

A. All schools must comply with the School Food and Beverage Policy by September 1, 2011. However, schools are encouraged to consider implementing the policy as soon as possible.

Q. What are the nutrition standards?

A. The nutrition standards embody the principles of healthy eating outlined in Canada's Food Guide and are intended to ensure that the food and beverages sold in schools contribute to students' healthy growth and development.

There are three categories of food products:

Healthiest (Sell Most) – These products are the healthiest options and generally have higher levels of essential nutrients and lower amounts of fat, sugar, and/or sodium. They must make up at least 80 per cent of all food choices that are

available for sale. For example, if a cafeteria offers 10 items for sale, at least eight must fall under the "sell most" category.

Healthy (Sell Less) – Compared to "sell most" products, these products may have slightly higher amounts of fat, sugar, and/or sodium. They cannot make up more than 20 per cent of all food choices that are available for sale.

Not Permitted – These are products that generally contain few or no essential nutrients and/or contain high amounts of fat, sugar, and/or sodium (e.g., deep-fried and other fried foods, confectionery). Food and beverages in this category may not be sold in schools.

A typical school cafeteria menu may look very similar to the menu that existed prior to the introduction of the nutrition standards. For example, a hamburger may be considered a "Sell Most" choice if it is prepared with extra-lean ground meat, whole grain bun, fresh lettuce and tomato. However, it may not be "permitted for sale" if it is prepared with regular ground meat, white bun and processed cheese.

Q. Will this increase the cost of food sold in schools?

A. Healthier food does not necessarily cost more.

A study done by the University of Minnesota found that more nutritious lunches don't necessarily cost more to produce. It also found that school lunch sales don't decline because healthier meals are served.

Q. Do the nutrition standards apply to food or beverages sold for fundraising activities?

A. It depends where the fundraising takes place. The nutrition standards apply to food and beverages sold on school premises for school purposes, including fundraising.

The nutrition standards do not apply to food and beverages sold off school premises. This would include fundraising activities that occur in a community centre or door-to-door.

Q. What about special-event days such as pizza lunches?

A. A school principal, in consultation with the school council, may designate up to ten days as special-event days on which food and beverages sold in schools would be exempt from the nutrition standards. Principals are also encouraged to consult with their students in making these decisions.

However, schools are encouraged to consider selling food and beverages that meet the nutrition standards or non-food related items for all celebrations.

Q. Who was consulted in developing this policy?

A. The policy was developed by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministries of Health Promotion, Children and Youth Services and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The Ministry of Education formed the Nutrition Standards for Schools Committee, a sub-committee of the ministry's Healthy Schools Working Table that included representatives from education, health and the food industry sectors, to advise on the development of the policy and nutrition standards. Consultations were also held with over 40 organizations and groups.

Q. Do other jurisdictions have school food and beverage policies?

A. Yes, many jurisdictions have policies and most Canadian provinces have policies or guidelines related to food and beverages in schools. For example, British Columbia has mandatory guidelines that apply to all food and beverages sold to students.