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A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

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Food Security: Impact on School Aged Kids and Families during COVID-19

With the onset of COVID-19, many families experienced job loss, childcare loss and school closures. Along with the unprecedented challenges of a worldwide pandemic, we saw societal inequities magnified. Household food insecurity rates have increased significantly from 10.5% in 2017-2018 to 14.7% in May 2020 (1).

Household food insecurity is defined as “the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints (2).” It affects both short and long term health of individuals. Children from food insecure households are more likely to have poor physical and mental health, are more likely to go to the hospital, and have poorer academic performance and cognitive outcomes in later life (3)(4).

The experience of household food insecurity can include (2):

- worry about running out of food before there is money to buy more,
- anxiety, embarrassment and fear of having to ask friends or family for food or money for food, or go to a charitable organization (like a food bank or breakfast program),
- the inability to afford a balanced nutritious diet,
- going hungry,

- missing meals, and
- not eating for a whole day because of a lack of food and money for food.

Immediate relief, like food banks and meal programs, are important supports for people who are hungry and can't afford their next meal. They do not, however, address the root cause of the problem, which is that many people don't have enough money for food.

Many schools in Saskatchewan have breakfast, lunch, and or snack programs. School food programs support student success through access to food and also by providing caring adult relationships that can increase a students' sense of security and wellbeing within the school (5).

Schools can continue to support student [safety and nutrition during COVID](#) by:

- Having designated school staff serve individual *portions* of fresh food to students onto separate *packages* (i.e. plate, paper bag, deli paper, napkin, etc.) using sterilized serving utensils.
- Offering healthy food choices such as cut up or whole vegetables and fruit, sandwiches, cheese and crackers, and milk, etc.

- Ensuring staff serving food (even wrapped food) use [safe food handling practices](#), e.g. wash hands frequently, wear a clean mask, etc.

What else can schools do?

- Start a [school nutrition or wellness team](#) so that you have support working on student food security needs.
- Visit the Food Secure Canada website ([foodsecurecanada.org](#)) for information on a [national school food program](#) and a [universal livable income floor](#).
- If the school doesn't have a food budget, try connecting with community groups that support child nutrition - ask if they have or know of any funding for food. You may also find out about places in the community to refer families to for low-to no cost meals and other financial and food assistance.
- Contact your [local dietitian](#) or [2-1-1](#) for more information.

References:

1. Stats Can. [Food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic 2020](#).
2. [PROOF. Household Food Insecurity](#).
3. Kirkpatrick, S. I., McIntyre, L., & Potestio, M. L. (2010). [Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health](#).
4. McIntyre, L., Williams, J., Lavorato, D., & Patten, S. (2013). [Depression and suicide ideation in late adolescence and early adulthood are an outcome of child hunger](#)
5. Elliott, S., and J. Black. 2020. [Care is the Secret Ingredient in School Lunch Programs](#).

Ask a Nutrition Expert



As educators, how do we support food insecure families during COVID-19?

Food insecurity can lead to survival behaviours (1). This means that when students don't have enough food consistently, they may hoard food or overeat during meal and snack times because they may fear food will not be available again when they need it. To help students understand that food will be available during the school day and to build trust, educators can (1)(2):

- Allow kids to carry their own 'stash,' like a bag of carrots, at their desk or with their belongings.
- Have [healthy snacks available in the classroom](#) that staff can serve when children are hungry.
- Keep regular meal and snack times. Ensure that students can get food every 2-3 hours.
- Offer a variety of food and enough for extra servings if possible. Restricting food unnecessarily can lead to distrust.
- Offer new foods with familiar foods. The familiar foods will help students feel more comfortable and can encourage them to try new ones.

What are some healthy, practical ideas that we can include when we give out food hampers?

Food hampers can be a way to offer healthy foods to school families who need extra help. Include familiar foods that people in your area would know how to cook or eat to avoid food waste. Pantry staples are great options to provide in a hamper so that families can spend money on fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables and meat products.

Try to think of balanced meals and snacks when planning hampers so families can get a variety of nutrients from different foods. Including a simple recipe with each box can also help encourage families to try some items, like chickpeas, beans, and whole grains. See recipe ideas here: www.cpha.ca/covid-19-and-basic-shelf-cookbook.

Some pantry staple ideas include (3):

- **Vegetables and fruit:** canned or jarred pasta sauce, canned green beans, peas, carrots, beets, any kind of fruit in juice (try to avoid those packed in syrup);

- **Whole Grains:** whole grain pasta, brown rice, wild rice, barley, and whole grain breakfast cereals.
- **Protein foods:** beans in tomato sauce, chickpeas, nut butters, and canned meats like salmon, tuna or chicken.
- **For more ideas download this resource:** [Healthier Food Items for Food Hampers](#) (4).

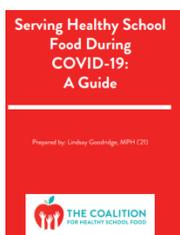
References:

1. Rowell, K. 2013. [Healing from Food Insecurity: Beyond the Stash](#). North American Council on Adoptable Children.
2. Adoptive Nutrition. [Children who hoard](#).
3. Food Banks Canada. 2020. [Healthy Food Donation Ideas for Heart Month](#)
4. Public Health Nutritionists of Saskatchewan. [Healthier Food Items for Food Hampers](#). Retrieved from SK Health Authority site formerly RQHR.

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Resources for you to use



1. [Teaching Nutrition in Saskatchewan: Nutrition Concepts and Resources](#) – These documents provide credible Canadian-based nutrition and food security information and resources for the learning community for grades 1-9 and Phys Ed 20 and 30 in English and French.
2. The Coalition for Healthy School Food. [Serving Healthy School Food During COVID-19: A Guide](#)
3. [Healthy at Home](#) - Dedicated Action for School Health (DASH): Created in BC, these easy to use one page resources can link to health and physical education curricula.
4. [Raising Our Healthy Kids Videos - School Age Nutrition](#): A series of 60-90 second videos with up-to-date nutrition information for school teachers, child educators, parents and health professionals working with children and youth.
5. [Resources for Rethinking](#) – connects to SK curriculum in various subjects and grades to explore the environmental, social and economic dimensions of important issues and events unfolding in our world today. For learning at school, outside and at home.