

Environmental Health Services Division

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Public Health – Seattle & King County supports school plans to create food share tables to make donated food available to children and to reduce waste. As a regulatory agency, one of Public Health’s roles is to assure that food donation is managed with food safety in mind. Any questions about how to set up food donation share tables may be addressed to Doug Dyer, Public Health – Seattle & King County at (ddyer@kingcounty.gov or by phone at 206-236-1518) or Keith Chhum, Public Health-Seattle & King County at (keith.chhum@kingcounty.gov or by phone at 206-263-8440).

BACKGROUND FOR FOOD DONATIONS FROM SCHOOL AND OTHER USDA NUTRITION PROGRAMS

On November 18, 2011, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act 2012 amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that provided statutory authority for schools and other USDA nutrition programs to have food recovery and donation policies. The statute clarifies that any food prepared, but not consumed may be donated to eligible local food banks or charitable organizations. The amendment defines eligible local food banks or charitable organizations to mean any food bank or charitable organization that is tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

For More Information Department of Health Charitable Food Guidelines

USDA Guidance on Food Donation in Child Nutrition Programs

www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp-05-2012-guidance-food-donation-program-child-nutrition-programs

Public Health-Seattle and King County Food Safety Program

Further questions regarding food safety and donated foods can be directed to your facility investigator, or by contacting the Public Health-Seattle at www.kingcounty.gov/foodsafety.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNAL SCHOOL DONATIONS (SHARE TABLES)

- School share tables should be limited to unopened school meal components (no homemade foods), unopened commercially packaged non-potentially hazardous foods (PHF), and whole fruits in non-edible peels; limited to service during the current meal period (meaning all phases of each day’s lunchtime); and offered from a designated and labeled collection area. *Examples of items accepted on Share Tables include shelf-stable packaged snacks such as granola bars, dry snacks, dried fruit, nuts, etc. Acceptable fruits include those with inedible peels such as bananas and oranges (citrus) that are intact (have not been opened). Uneaten, whole apples and other fruits with edible skins are acceptable and may be placed on share tables for students to take only if they are rinsed prior to service and assessed for no damage to edible skin.

Apples and other fruits with edible skins not rinsed by the school may be collected for donation to a nonprofit organization that has received a variance from Public Health Seattle-King County to pick up foods and drinks previously served to students.

- Share table bins, containers, or collection areas must be at least six inches off the floor. This can be accomplished by placing a share bin or container on a designated cart, counter, or table, or by placing the share bin or container on an empty milk crate or other sturdy surface that is six inches or more above the floor.

- PHF's offered for table sharing may require a variance based on the proposed equipment and/or amount of time the food and drink products may be above required holding temperatures. PHF food examples include carton milk, individual yogurt containers, and individual portion string cheese. All packaging must be intact (not open) and free of damage. Unpacked (opened) PHF's are not permitted. In general, all PHF's must be maintained at 41 deg. F. This can be accomplished through the use of mechanical refrigeration or ice packs that are correctly used. In some cases time control may be used, however this requires a careful conversation between schools and Public Health Seattle-King County representative in order to assess and minimize food safety risk. Time control requires record keeping and oversight that must be approved prior to implementing.

If a variance is required, it will not include a fee, but instead will be a signed document stating how the school district or private school is allowing its school(s) to set up share tables and/or food donation. Such a document will provide Public Health Seattle-King County field investigators with helpful, prior notice about share tables and food donation before school visits.

- It is understood that each school food sharing program may be different depending on number of lunch periods, food service staffing, types of foods shared, and available equipment and financial resources. Therefore, it is important that school district food service representative meet with Public Health Seattle-King County to review processes, equipment, food service times, and resources in order to develop food safety parameters.

For schools that already have share tables, the school district food service representative or private school kitchen manager is encouraged to contact Doug Dyer or Keith Chhum with the Public Health-Seattle and King County Food and Facilities program to discuss current practices. Public Health Seattle-King County understands that previously set-up share tables did not have benefit of this 2019 guidance document, and we will assist in discussing best practices.

The King County Green Schools Program also is available to assist schools to set up Share Tables and donation programs according to these considerations. That program provides milk crates, signs tailored to each district, assistance educating students about these programs, and other guidance as needed.

- Backpack Brigades and other food donations for school children to take home should be limited to school meal components or commercially-packaged snack foods (no homemade foods). Backpack items with potentially hazardous food (PHF) ingredients must be kept refrigerated at 41 deg. F, or less.

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