Food-based learning: Tips for elementary schools during COVID-19

This resource is intended to support educators in BC elementary schools to feel confident doing food-based education while following the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Settings. Food-based learning provides opportunities for cross-curricular connections while promoting physical and mental health. Food preparation and food-based activities can continue to be offered in schools by following usual food safety protocols. Be sure to factor in time for hand washing and any necessary cleaning or sanitizing.

Food-based activity ideas during COVID-19

Talking and reflecting about food helps students apply new concepts
- Introduce foods with the “What Am I?” game, food riddles, or reading a book
- Explore the edible parts of plants or research the life cycle of a plant
- Virtually connect students with Elders and knowledge keepers to learn about growing, harvesting, and preserving local foods
- Take a nature walk to identify local plants and animals
- Draw or write about a food experience, or try these journal templates

Growing and harvesting food connects students to local food systems
- Engage in local food foraging or harvesting
- Explore seed catalogues as a garden planning activity (consider budget, seed spacing, harvest times, etc.)
- Learn about germination by sprouting beans or seeds
- Create a mini windowsill greenhouse
- Grow a potato tub garden with the Spuds in Tubs program

Preparing and tasting builds food skills and familiarity
- Research favourite family recipes and create a classroom cookbook
- Practice knife skills by peeling, cutting, and chopping ingredients using individual cutting boards and cutting utensils
- Do a taste test activity with seasonal produce, such as BC apples. Produce may be available to your school through the BC Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program
- Prepare yogurt sundaes, mini pizzas, trail mix, or fruity flavoured water
Frequently asked questions

Can students eat food they prepared together as part of learning?
Students can eat foods they’ve prepared as part of learning. They should not share eating utensils or bites of the same food portion, or drink from the same container. Usual food safety and hand washing practices apply.

Can students bring food from home to share with others?
It’s recommended that homemade food items not be shared with other students at this time (e.g., birthday foods, bake sale items).

Can students share cooking tools and equipment?
Cooking tools and equipment can be shared as long as proper hand hygiene practices are followed. Equipment should also be cleaned and sanitized with products approved for food contact surfaces.

Do students need to physically distance during food-based activities?
The public health guidelines apply to food-based learning in the same way as they apply to other activities. Within a learning group, physical distancing is encouraged, but not required or possible at all times. Aim to have students work individually or in small groups for food preparation.

Do students need to wear face masks for food-based activities?
Face masks are not required within a learning group during food-based activities, but may be a personal choice for students and staff.

See the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Settings and the BCCDC Food Safety resource for additional guidance.