

## **EXECUTIVE MEMORANDUM NO. 2003/017 GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL CANTEENS AND OTHER SCHOOL FOOD SERVICES**

The school council has a special role to play in the education, health and wellbeing of the school's students.

It is recommended that the school council develops a policy for its canteen and other school food services that supports this role.

These guidelines apply to school food services that include, but are not limited to, food supplied in school canteens, school food and drink dispensing machines, camps and out of school hours care programs.

It is acknowledged that many school councils have contractual arrangements in relation to their canteens and these arrangements need to be honoured.

These guidelines can be implemented over a period of time, depending on local circumstances.

Where a school has a specific relationship with a retail shop (e.g. local milk bar) for the provision of school meals, consideration also needs to be given to how these guidelines can apply.

The health benefits of a nutritious diet should not be underestimated. Consuming nutritious food and adopting a healthy life style assist students to grow and develop to their optimum potential leading to improved educational outcomes. A healthy diet plays a preventative role in relation to nutrition-related conditions and diseases such as overweight, obesity and dental disease, and, in later life, osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus (type 2) and a range of cancers.

It is imperative that parents, teachers and students work together to support a whole-school approach to building a school culture in which students actively choose nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle.

The eating habits of students are greatly influenced by the food available in the school environment. Food eaten at school contributes substantially to the students' daily nutrient intake and also has a considerable influence in the development of their eating habits, growth patterns and energy levels.

The consumption of food also provides opportunities for social connection and enjoyment, which are highly valued in school communities. It is recommended that providers of school food services consider a variety of foods that take account of the socio-cultural and socio-economically diverse backgrounds of students at the school.

## **1 What is a healthy school food service?**

A healthy school food service:

- makes it easy for students to choose healthy snacks and meals
- offers a variety of nutritious food and snacks
- promotes food that is consistent with current best knowledge in the provision of nutritious food for students
- can be an avenue for consistent and continual health education
- complements the diverse elements of the school curriculum
- involves students and parents
- is an integral part of the entire healthy school environment.

## **2 Whole-school approach to healthy eating**

The school food services and the curriculum programs on healthy eating should complement each other. Ideally, positive peer pressure within the education setting will create a culture in which nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle are actively chosen. This culture should permeate the whole school environment and have an impact on the family.

The Health Promoting Schools Framework, developed by the Health Promoting Schools project, provides a useful model for schools to promote and protect the health of students. The framework highlights the importance of the relationships between:

- curriculum, teaching and learning
- school organisation, ethos and environment
- community links and partnerships.

Information about Health Promoting Schools can be accessed at:

<<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/hps/>>

## **3 Guidelines for healthy eating**

A healthy school food service can use, as the basis of its operations, the *Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents* (National Health and Medical Research Council 1995). These guidelines, which are currently under review, can be accessed at:

<<http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/publications/synopses/n1syn.htm>>

According to the *Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents*, children need sufficient nutritious food to grow and develop to their optimum potential. The guidelines encourage students to:

- enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods
- eat plenty of vegetables and fruits
- eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles)
- eat lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives such as legumes and nuts
- choose water as a drink
- moderate total fat intake
- choose foods low in salt
- eat only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars.

Another useful resource for schools is the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*. This was developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services to help Australians choose a healthy diet using a variety of foods. Information, including a complementary poster and supporting literature about the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating 1998*, can be obtained from:  
<<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/whatis.htm>>

#### **4 The school canteen as a viable operation**

School canteens need to be viable. Profit from the operations of a school canteen is often a significant source of revenue for the school. Consequently, it is important that the nutritious food items are attractive to students and are offered at an affordable price that will contribute to profit.

A positive attitude towards a school canteen that supports healthy eating should be promoted and endorsed. This would be facilitated through a whole-school approach to nutrition—providing information on food, nutrition and healthy eating habits that take into account values, attitudes and beliefs about food and eating. There would need to be a clear understanding of the sociocultural and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds of the students to cater for their needs.

Students and their families need to be involved in the process of establishing a healthy school food service. Strategies to involve them include:

- educating students as part of the Health and Physical Education key learning area
- educating and informing parents through articles in the school newsletter, announcements at school assemblies and community activities
- involving parents and students to seek ideas for menu items
- advertising canteen prices on notice boards and sending price lists home to families
- engaging the school council/principal/teachers to commit to supporting healthy eating and a healthy school environment
- encouraging parents to support the school canteen by volunteering their services.

## **5 How to get started on a healthy school food service**

The following points are suggestions to support a school council to move towards a healthy food service.

- Form a working party or a subcommittee of the school council, involving canteen staff, teachers, parents and, where appropriate, students.
- Engage support for the provision of a healthy school food service.  
Involve the principal, canteen administrator, canteen staff (including paid and volunteer workers), the canteen committee, teachers and other staff, the school parent body, parents and students.
- Build awareness and knowledge.  
Collect and disseminate current and reputable information about nutrition and health through the provision of guest speakers, professional development for teachers and activities/videos for the school community.
- Find out what is already happening.  
Identify whether there is already a policy in place, whether it is recent, if it follows current guidelines and if it is being properly implemented. Identify any other school policies that impinge on the school food services.
- Find out what people think.  
Survey the school community. The type and range of foods provided by the school food services and the popular food items need to be identified. The extent to which the parents/staff/students support the school food services and the degree of satisfaction with them also need to be established.
- Develop a draft policy based on the information provided in these nutrition guidelines and circulate it to the school community for feedback.
- Present the modified draft to the school council for approval.
- Develop a detailed implementation plan.
- Stipulate a timeline for reviewing and evaluating the policy on a regular basis.

## **6 What food could be provided?**

The food items provided will depend on:

- the cost and availability of the food products
- the needs and backgrounds of the students
- the weather
- the food preparation and storage facilities of the school.

Below is a list of food items collated from several healthy school food services that have found favour with their school communities. It is not expected that a school would provide all of these foods at any one time—this list is meant to

provide a range of ideas. The choice of the particular menu or range of suitable foods would also depend on the size of the school, the facilities and the number of people involved with the school food service.

**Foods recommended to be available daily include:**

*Sandwiches, meat, vegetables, fruit*

- sandwiches/rolls/pita and mountain bread with a variety of nutritious fillings (salad vegetables, lean meats, chicken, cheeses, avocado, hummus, chutney, peanut butter, vegemite)
- toasted sandwiches/jaffles with a selection of the above fillings
- muffins, scones or fruit loaf
- healthy breakfast cereal
- pita pizza with tomato, cheese and vegetable toppings
- pasta and noodles
- rice dishes, steamed/fried rice
- pilaf with meats or vegetables (catering for halal and kosher requirements)
- felafel rolls
- baked beans, bean salad
- soy products
- omelettes, hard boiled eggs
- vegetable sticks with yoghurt, hummus, dips, cheese, peanut butter
- salad tubs (e.g. tabouli, coleslaw, Greek salad)
- baked potatoes with a variety of nutritious fillings (baked beans, corn kernels, sour cream)
- corn on the cob
- celery sticks with cheese or peanut butter filling
- soups
- a variety of fruits, including cantaloupe, watermelon, mandarins, apricots, figs, mangoes.

*Drinks*

- milk drinks
- yoghurt drinks
- soy drinks
- fruit smoothies
- water
- soft drinks low in sugar.

**There should be some limitations on the quantity and/or the frequency of the availability of the following foods:**

- deep-fried food (e.g. chips, dim sims, potato cakes)
- pastry items (e.g. pies, sausage rolls, croissants, vanilla slices)
- hot dogs and sausages

- cakes, biscuits and doughnuts
- confectionery (sweets, lollies, liquorice and chocolate)
- high sugar soft drinks, sports/electrolyte drinks and caffeine drinks.

## **7 Ways to market healthier food choices to students**

The school is a significant influence on students' lifelong healthy eating habits. Schools can encourage healthy food choices by:

- offering a variety of nutritious foods and regularly changing the menu
- encouraging staff to set a good example by enjoying healthy food choices themselves
- displaying food items in an attractive manner
- packaging food items so that students can clearly see the content of the package
- packaging/selling foods in appropriate serving sizes
- using a daily specials board featuring healthy choices
- initiating a competition to name a new food item for the school canteen
- promoting a food item in the school canteen based on a school theme
- encouraging students to become involved in food-related activities, such as planning meals, shopping for food products and cooking
- discussing food promotion and advertising with students
- involving students in the menu selection process
- supporting an enthusiastic group of people to serve the food to students.

## **8 Food hygiene and handling**

Current requirements specify that all food premises, including schools, must demonstrate that food is safe to eat in accordance with the Victorian *Food Act 1984* (amended in 1997).

School food services are regarded as Class 2 food premises. Class 2 food premises must prepare a food safety program based on a template obtained from the Department of Human Services. In line with this food safety program, a food safety supervisor is also required for all premises that prepare or serve food. The food safety supervisor must have the appropriate level of training, skills and knowledge to ensure that all regulations are followed and that anyone handling food has the appropriate level of training.

Food safety and food handling requirements cover personal hygiene practices, food preparation practices, food storage and cleaning procedures.

Personal hygiene practices include:

- washing and drying hands—before handling food and again frequently during work
- not smoking near food
- not going to work when sick (with a gastric disorder or contagious disease)
- using a handkerchief or tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Food preparation practices include:

- ensuring that food is handled by either a gloved hand or by utensils
- ensuring that benches are clean
- ensuring that there are suitable areas for food preparation (animals are forbidden in these areas)
- avoiding cross-contamination of cooked and raw foods. Hands or utensils that have been used to prepare raw food must be washed properly before they are used to prepare ready-to-eat or cooked foods.

Food storage involves:

- ensuring that cold food is stored below 5°C
- ensuring that frozen food is stored below minus 15°C
- ensuring that hot food is maintained at over 60°C
- minimising the time that food is kept in the danger zone—between 5°C and 60°C. The ‘danger zone’ is the temperature at which bacteria are most likely to grow.

Cleaning procedures involve:

- ensuring that there is a display of schedules outlining how the premises are cleaned
- having procedures for the storage and disposal of garbage and the location of bins.

For more detailed information see section 4.4.6.11 of the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*. Further information can also be obtained from <<http://www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au/>> or the Food Safety Victoria Hotline on 1300 364 352.

## **9 The role of the school council**

The school council has the authority through the *Education Act 1958* to operate a school canteen. This authority can be delegated to a club/association that is not a subcommittee of the school council or sub-leased to a private contractor under a licence. This licence is obtained from the Department of Education and Training.

If a school canteen is sub-leased to a private contractor, the school council should ensure that the contract specifies that food be sold in accordance with the recommendations of the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* at <<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/whatis.htm>> and the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents* at <<http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/publications/synopses/n1syn.htm>> and that the operation (stores, stock taking, trading/profit/loss statements etc) of school canteens and other school food services is consistent with the information provided in section 7.17 of the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*.

## **10 Where to get help—a list of resources**

*Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents* (National Health and Medical Research Council 1995, currently under review)

<<http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/publications/synopses/n1syn.htm>>

*Australian Guide to Healthy Eating 1998*

<<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/whatis.htm>>

Dietitians Association of Australia

<<http://www.daa.asn.au>>

and Accredited Practising Dietitian Hotline on 1800 812 942

Food Safety Victoria

<<http://www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au/>>

Telephone 1300 364 352

Health Promoting Schools

<<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/hps/>>

National Heart Foundation of Australia

Telephone 1300 362 787

Nutrition Australia—Nutrition in Schools Advisory Service

<<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/>>

Public Health Nutrition Information—Department of Human Services

<<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phd/nutrition/>>

Telephone 9637 4047 or 9637 4029

Schools' Canteen Buying Group Inc.

Telephone 9415 7726

Victorian Home Economics and Textiles Teachers' Association  
<<http://www.vhetta.com.au>>  
Telephone 9888 2240  
Freecall (Victorian country schools) 1800 803 762  
Facsimile 9457 5974  
Email [vsca@hyp.com.au](mailto:vsca@hyp.com.au)

*Resources used by other state education departments*

South Australia—Children's Health and Development Foundation  
<<http://www.chdf.org.au/>>

Tasmania—Tasmanian School Canteen Handbook  
<<http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/hpe/cmh/Default.htm>>

Western Australia  
<<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/nphp/key/key17/body17.1.htm>>

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