

Recess/Nutrition Break Guidelines

Elementary Schools



The following guidelines are provided to assist school administrators in planning for safe nutrition breaks and outdoor recess play during the Reopening of Schools for the 2020-2021 school year and are based on the Ministry of Education “Guide to Reopening Ontario’s Schools”. Additional resources for Physical Education and “play” is available through PHE Canada ([PHE Canada’s Return to School Guidelines](#)). Principals and Vice-principals should consider the following guidelines in planning for the unique needs of each school community:

Washroom Breaks

- Students must wash hands before and after using the washroom.
- Custodial staff should check and clean washrooms frequently, ensuring that soap and paper towel supplies are sufficient throughout the day. Washrooms (toilet fixtures, faucets, etc) will be cleaned a minimum of twice daily.
- Schools should timetable washroom breaks to stagger use of bathrooms by classrooms (or cohorts of classes).
- Distancing protocols must be communicated and adhered to for washroom breaks. Signage should be posted to ensure social distancing guidelines are followed.

Water Fountains

- Traditional water fountains are to be marked as “closed” and shut off where possible.
- Students are required to bring a personal water bottle that is clearly labelled and kept with them during the day. Bottles should be filled using water bottle filling stations or other potable water sources.

Lunch/Food Service, Breaks, Consumption

- Where possible, lunch times should be staggered to facilitate hand washing, washroom breaks, and reduce traffic flow.
- A handwashing schedule for each classroom is recommended to avoid congestion at sinks.
- Students will wash hands before and after consumption of any food.
- Students will eat lunch in their classrooms, at their assigned desk.
- School recycling programs (tetra packs, milk cartons, paper products) should be suspended until further notice.
- Garbage from snacks and lunches may be placed in classroom garbage containers. Social distancing must be adhered to.
- Custodial staff will wipe down desk/table surfaces following any food consumption.

Transitions

- Consider traffic flow to entry/exit points when scheduling washroom breaks and access to outdoor play areas during nutrition breaks.
- Communication, signage, and education regarding traffic flow is critical in hallways, entry and exit points, and other high traffic areas.
- Where double doors exist, label clearly as “entry” and “exit” only.

- In preparing for transitions, students should line up in small groups to ensure social distancing guidelines. Where possible, floor markings and signs should indicate 2 metre distances for both entry and exit into classrooms, gymnasiums, washrooms, etc.

Outdoor Play

- Designate play areas by creating “zones” to reduce the number of students who are in contact with each other. Play areas should not exceed a capacity of 50 students at any given time.
- Block outdoor play times to maintain consistent mixing of cohorts.
- Stagger entry and exit routes and routines to avoid bottlenecks.
- Students should engage in “parallel” play – games and activities that facilitate distancing.
- Handwashing or sanitization should occur before and after outdoor recess play.
- Classrooms (or cohorts/clustered classrooms) should have their own play equipment (balls, skipping ropes, etc.) that is not shared with other groups. Custodial staff should clean play equipment regularly and frequently.

Indoor Recess

- Outdoor recess play is encouraged whenever possible. During periods of inclement weather (heavy rain, temperatures below wind chill threshold), indoor recess can be held but students must remain with their class/cohort in their respective classrooms.
- Where possible, activities and DPA opportunities that adhere to social distancing protocols should be available for students during indoor recesses.
- Adherence to washroom schedules is critical during indoor recess breaks.