

# **FAQs for Schools**

## ***Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC***

### **(2005, Ministries of Education and Health)**

#### **Are the *Guidelines* voluntary?**

Although implementation of the *Guidelines* is initially voluntary, the Ministry of Education will be measuring how schools change over time to ensure that BC fulfills its commitment to enhance the health and education outcomes of all our children and youth. One of those outcomes is the elimination of Not Recommended food and beverages by 2009.

#### **What kind of time-table is suggested for implementing the *Guidelines*?**

Each school can design a time-table that works best for their population (grades, socioeconomic factors) and location (urban, rural, etc) with the goal that by 2009:

- 'Choose Most' and 'Choose Sometimes' items are maximized;
- 'Choose Least' items are minimized; and
- 'Not Recommended' items have been phased out.

Some changes will be easy to make right away. For example, there are plenty of beverage choices available that meet the *Guidelines*, like water, plain milk and most flavoured milks (skim, 1%, 2%, whole), and 100% juices.

Healthier packaged snack and meal choices will need to be phased in as the availability of healthier choices in the marketplace increases. School stores and cafeterias, which rely less on packaged foods than vending machines do, will be able to progress to healthier snacks and meals more quickly.

#### **Where can schools get help to implement the *Guidelines*?**

There are a variety of places for schools to get help.

- Many schools have formed successful teams that focus on nutrition to plan and implement changes. The teams can have a diverse membership, with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and vendors, etc.
- Ask within your Parent Advisory Committee if there are parents with an interest in health that could help.
- Your vendor may be able to advise you as to how the items on their stock list fit into the *Guidelines*.
- Check out the Making It Happen school food resources (videos, tips, handouts) at <http://www.knowledgenetwork.ca/makingithappen>
- Your local Health Unit's Community Nutritionist or Public Health Nurse can be a great source of assistance.

#### **Do the *Guidelines* apply to lunches organized by parent groups?**

Yes, unless the lunches are provided free-of-cost. The *Guidelines* apply to any food or beverages sold to students within the school grounds and at school-organized events off the school grounds (eg. track meets), regardless of the organizing group.

**Can we apply the *Guidelines* more broadly than just to the items we sell?**

Yes. The *Guidelines* can apply to all food and beverages in the school environment. The only caution is in using the *Guidelines* for lunches brought from home. Schools can share information about healthy lunches/snacks with students and parents, but they should not be policing what is in lunch bags.

**What about home economics classes? Business classes?**

The curriculum encourages teachers to use Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating as their nutrition standard. However, if a class is responsible for items being sold to students, then the *Guidelines* should apply.

**The *Guidelines* seem very detailed. Why?**

The *Guidelines* provide technical scientific information. Many packaged/processed foods in our complex food supply defy easy identification within Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. BC's detailed nutrition criteria were designed to prevent the misinterpretation problems that occurred with simpler school food guidance resources used in the past.

**Any tips to make the *Guidelines* easier to use?**

Keep a list of the items you sell, and document how they rate against the nutrition criteria. A sample form is available at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health> (look for the "Food and Beverages, Stock list and Nutrition Rating" form). If schools develop their own computer form, it is easy to sort for an alphabetical or "Choose Most/Choose Sometimes" listing of your stock list.

**How did the nutrition criteria get developed?**

Experiences from the staff and students in schools that have made changes to healthier choices were studied, including many BC schools. Throughout 2005, focus groups and conference calls were held with teachers, principals/administrators/trustees, parents, vendors, food manufacturers, dietitians, dental health professionals, public health nurses, pediatricians, agriculture, federal food inspectors, and other provinces' school health consultants to get their opinions on key nutrition and food supply issues facing today's children in the school environment.

With this collective perspective, an Advisory Group of BC Community Nutritionists (Registered Dietitians) then looked at the nutrition facts of over 900 foods, including many popular vended snacks and beverages, and set the nutrition criteria for the *Guidelines* based on the current and potential food supply.

### What is the rationale behind the specific nutrient limits?

The nutrients were chosen for their importance for children's growth and learning, and for how easily schools could access information about the specific nutrient in a product.

Nutrient/ Component	Criteria Intent is to:	Rationale
Calories	prevent "super-sizing"	Excess calories are contributing to rising rates of overweight and obesity in children
Total Fat	moderate intake (not eliminate)	Fat is found in many nutritious foods but is a concentrated source of calories.
Saturated Fat	moderate intake (not eliminate)	Saturated fats are found in many nutritious foods, but are a concentrated source of calories and may contribute to heart disease.
Trans Fat	eliminate intake of man-made trans fats	Man-made trans fats, created during processing, contribute serious risks to everyone's health. In the Milk-based Foods and Beverages, Meats & Alternatives, and Mixed Entrée food groupings the trans fat criteria allow for the small amount of trans fat naturally found in the milk and meat of certain animals (cows, lamb, goat, deer, moose, elk, bison).
Sodium	moderate intake (not eliminate)	Sodium is very prevalent in foods popular with children and can easily exceed the recommended maximum intake.
Fibre	increase intake	For the Grain food grouping, fibre can help a food become "Choose Most". Fibre is inconsistent in other food groupings so further criteria were not established.
Sugars	decrease intake	The World Health Organization recommends that no more than 10% of children's calories should come from sugar, and sugary non-nutritious drinks are clearly linked to obesity and tooth decay in children. Sugar criteria in the Guidelines are generous and should not be exceeded.
Protein	ensure food quality	In the Meat & Alternatives food grouping protein criteria ensure the product does not have excess fillers
Calcium	increase intake	Most children do not meet their calcium requirements.
Iron	ensure food quality	Iron criteria were set to ensure Grains were whole grains or enriched, and to ensure Meats & Alternatives did not have excess fillers. The iron criteria reflect minimum amounts which should be surpassed when possible.

### What about caffeine?

Health Canada has set safety limits for caffeine in children. The criteria for caffeine in the *Guidelines* are stricter than Health Canada's safety limits to help prevent a cumulative daily intake exceeding the safety limit. The criteria also reflect the fact that children's behaviour and ability to learn are affected at intakes below the safety limits.

### What about artificial sweeteners?

After a careful review of current scientific literature, the Advisory Group decided to allow artificial sweeteners within the Choose Sometimes category. Choose Sometimes foods contribute important nutrients for children. An exception was made for "Other Beverages". Artificially sweetened "other beverages" typically do not contribute nutrients (unless fortified) and have significant amounts of artificial sweeteners. The Advisory Group concluded their intake should be minimized. They are Choose Least items.

### **Why aren't the criteria for fat set lower?**

Children are not yet fully grown and their brains and cells need a greater proportion of fat than adults' do. Also, fat is found in many healthy foods. Allowing foods with moderate fat content helps schools to encourage children to take a holistic approach, rather than a fat phobic approach, to healthy eating. All the nutrition criteria together, not just fat alone, help to screen out less healthy items.

### **Are "Not Recommended" foods junk-foods?**

Some "Not Recommended" items, like pop and candy, are commonly called "junk food", but you don't become *bad* or *junky* if you eat them. These foods are fine to enjoy in small amounts from time to time, but it is best that schools do not promote them by selling them to students. Some of the nutrition criteria, like trans fat limits, put some otherwise very healthy choices into the "Not Recommended" group. Look for healthier versions that pass the criteria.

### **Why does BC allow hot dogs?**

While most wieners are very high in salt, total fat, or trans fat, there is nothing inherently wrong with the concept of hot dogs. In fact, healthier wieners do exist, and manufacturers are likely to develop more. Look for the nutrition criteria for wieners in the Meat & Alternatives food grouping of the *Guidelines*. Look for tips on serving a healthier hot dog in the web resource "Healthier Foods: How To Make Fun-Fast-Food Healthier For Students" at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/>.

### **Why does BC allow potato chips and corn chips?**

The key issues are the serving size, and the fat and sodium content. Some chip manufacturers have developed lower sodium, trans fat-free versions of chips. They provide some nutrients, and in small portions (or moderate portions for the lower fat versions) they can be an occasional snack. Look for nutrition criteria for chips in the Grain food grouping (corn, wheat, rice chips) and the Vegetable/Fruit grouping (potato, apple chips) of the *Guidelines*.

### **Why does BC allow french fries?**

Some, but not all, french fries are allowed. Just like hot dogs and chips, french fries need to be assessed according to the nutrition criteria in the *Guidelines* (look in the Vegetables & Fruit food grouping). Baked fries will almost always be healthier choices than deep-fried fries, but the key issues will be the serving size or total calories, and the fat, trans fat and sodium content.

### **Some foods don't have Nutrition Facts on their label. How do we know if we can sell them?**

By December 12, 2005 all foods will have Nutrition Facts labels (except for small companies which have until December 12, 2007). In the meantime, check the manufacturer's Canadian website (search for "nutrition" from their home page) or call their toll free number if it is on the package. Dial-A-Dietitian can also help you determine where the food fits in the *Guidelines*. Call Dial-A-Dietitian at 604-732-9191 (toll free in BC at 1-800-667-3438).

### **How can we make changes when we have a contract with a vendor?**

This should not be a problem. Vendors have a wide selection of beverages and snacks, healthier choices as well as less healthy choices, in their inventory. The Canadian Automatic Merchandising Association is encouraging its members to work within their contracts to provide healthier choices for schools.

### **How can we market the healthier choices to students?**

Involve the students in your marketing plan. One Principal in a middle school got the students together in the gym, gave them a list of healthier choices, and asked them to pick their favourites to go into the vending machines and school store. The students felt pride and ownership in the changes. Secondary schools have involved their business students or student council.

Schools that have already made the switch report that students accept and enjoy the healthier foods within a matter of weeks – sometimes just a few days! Give them positive reasons for the healthier choices. Instead of saying “it’s for your own good” or “junk food is bad for you” try:

- “Healthier foods give your brain (or muscles) better fuel”
- “Milk has calcium to make your bones strong, and energy to help your body play”
- “Apples aren’t just nutritious, they’re also sweet, crunchy, natural, and delicious.”
- “Our school is the best, and so we deserve the best food.”

### **What do all the dental cautions in the *Guidelines* really mean?**

The bottom line for dental health at school is to prevent grazing and sipping all day, two habits that are known to increase the incidence of tooth decay. Schools can encourage students to not eat or drink (except plain water) during class time.

### **Where can we get more information on healthy eating in schools?**

The Ministry of Education website has links to many healthy eating resources at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/>. Resources include:

- Healthier Foods: How To Make Fun-Fast-Food Healthier For Students
- How Sweet It Is! What Schools Need To Know About Sugar And Artificial Sweeteners
- Fat and Trans Fat: What Schools Need To Know
- Caffeine And The Student Body
- Dental Health And School Food And Beverage Sales