

Education Bureau Circular No. 17/2009
Meal Arrangements in School

[Note : This circular should be read by-

- (a) Supervisors/Heads of all primary and secondary schools, special schools and kindergartens for necessary action; and
- (b) Heads of sections for information.]

SUMMARY

This circular advises schools to formulate a policy on healthy eating and on the necessary steps to ensure supply of healthy and green meals at school with a view to promoting a healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle among students.

DETAILS

School Policy on Healthy Eating and Green Meals

2. Schools play a crucial role in providing a supportive environment for students, staff, parents and the community to interact in protecting children's health and the environment. Schools are advised to formulate a school policy to promote healthy eating and green meals among students. The policy should be documented for information of all teaching staff, parents and students, and the implementation should be monitored regularly.

About Lunch

3. Appropriate lunch arrangements in schools are conducive to promoting students' good eating habits and a healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle. Schools should pay attention to the nutritional standards, food safety measures and the principle of reducing waste. In this connection, schools are requested to refer to the following guidelines which may be updated from time to time as appropriate:

- (a) “Guidelines on Meal Arrangements in Schools” and frequently asked questions on the website of the Education Bureau (EDB) (https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/meal%20arrangement%20guidelines_Eng.pdf);
- (b) “Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students” developed by the Department of Health (DH) at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/lunch_guidelines_bi.pdf;
- (c) “Guidelines on How to Promote Green Lunch in Schools” issued by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) at https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en/schools/green_lunch.htm; and
- (d) “Guidelines on How to Ensure School Lunches Ordered Are Safe” on the website of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) at http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia_pub/files/school_lunches_ordered_are_safe.pdf.

4. Schools should, on top priority, take out “Strongly Discouraged Food Items” from all menu choices and consider stopping the supply of snacks under the “Snacks to Choose Less” category as mentioned in the “Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students” and the “Nutritional Guidelines on Snacks for Students” in order to help reduce intake of total fat, salt and sugar by students with a view to preventing them from having long-term health problems. Schools should work with parents, suppliers and students to monitor the provision of healthy and green lunch on an ongoing basis so that improvement measures can be taken promptly by suppliers. Schools are strongly encouraged to document their monitoring work to facilitate ongoing review.

5. For lunch arrangements in kindergartens, please refer to the

- (a) “Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions” on EDB’s website (https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/overview/Operation_Manual_eng.pdf).
- (b) “Nutrition Guidelines for Children Aged 2-6 (For Kindergartens and Child Care Centres)” on DH’s website (https://www.startsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/nutritional_guide_en.pdf);
and
- (c) “Food Safety Guidelines on Catering Services for Children” on CFS’s website (http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia_pub/files/children_catering.pdf).

Selection of School Lunch Suppliers

6. In the selection of lunch suppliers, schools should comply with the principles and guidelines promulgated in prevailing circulars on “Trading Operations in Schools”, “Tendering and Purchasing Procedures in Aided Schools” and other relevant guidelines issued by EDB from time to time where appropriate.

7. In choosing lunch suppliers, schools are reminded that the suppliers must possess a food factory licence permitted to supply lunch boxes issued by FEHD. In this connection, schools should request the licensees of their school lunch suppliers to provide documents to prove that their premises are licensed for the purpose of supplying lunch boxes and should check the licence information submitted by the suppliers against FEHD’s list of licensed food factories to verify their authenticity. If the licensed food factory engages a sub-contractor to take up the orders for supplying lunch boxes on behalf of the licensee or in manufacturing items of ready-to-eat food to form part of the food components of the lunch boxes, both the licensed food factories and the sub-contractors have to observe additional licensing conditions enforced by FEHD. An updated list of the licensed food factories approved to supply lunch boxes by FEHD is available at <https://www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/licence-foodPremises-nonrest.html>.

8. As an aid to schools for selecting lunch suppliers most capable of providing healthy and delicious green lunch for students, DH has, in consultation with EPD, developed Protocol for Selection of School Lunch Suppliers and sample tender documents, which are available at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/doc/supplier_doc3_tender_en.doc, for use of schools. DH has laid down comprehensive procedures for the selection of school lunch suppliers, including forming a committee for selecting lunch suppliers, setting out service requirements and assessment criteria, issuing an open invitation to tender and adopting a pre-determined two-envelope system whereby the price and quality are taken into account in tender assessment.

9. Schools should involve parents in the selection process by engaging them in the lunch supplier selection team to develop lunch requirements, selection criteria, marking scheme and major terms of the tender/contract. Schools may also invite parents’ feedback on the quality of lunch to be taken into account in the selection process.

About Snacks

10. To promote healthy snacks at school, it is critical to educate children about healthy food choices and provide a healthy eating environment which makes healthy choices easier. In this connection, DH has developed “Nutritional Guidelines on Snacks for Students”, which is available at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/snack_guidelines_bi.pdf for schools’ reference.

11. Snacks sold at school tuckshops or by vending machines directly influence students’ eating habits and their health. Hence, schools are requested to pay due regard to the nutritional value of items to be sold at school. Schools should work with parents, suppliers and students to monitor the provision of healthy snacks on an ongoing basis so that improvement measures can be taken promptly by suppliers. Schools are also encouraged to document their monitoring work to facilitate ongoing review.

12. Schools should also follow the principle of reducing waste in choosing food items available for sale at tuckshops and vending machines. In this connection, schools should avoid the supply of food with over-packaging and the use of disposable containers. Where use of disposable containers is unavoidable, containers made of degradable materials should be used.

13. For snacks arrangements in kindergartens, please refer to the “Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions” at EDB’s website (https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/overview/Operation_Manual_eng.pdf) and the “Nutrition Guidelines for Children Aged 2-6 (For Kindergartens and Child Care Centres)” on DH’s website (https://www.startsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/nutritional_guide_en.pdf).

Selection of Snacks Suppliers

14. When selecting snacks suppliers, schools should refer to the principles and procedures laid down in relevant circulars and guidelines as mentioned in paragraph 6 above.

15. Schools should define the types of snacks (in accordance with nutritional value) offered for sale and incorporate the nutritional standards into the tender specification as well as the contracts signed with tuckshop operators by making reference to the “Nutritional Guidelines on Snacks for Students” issued by DH.

Acceptance of Donations / Advantages

16. Schools have to realize its role as a mediator between food suppliers and those parents who pay for their children's food and should not allow the choice of food suppliers to be in any way influenced by a donation, nor any other form of advantages, as this will likely place them in an obligatory position to the food suppliers. Schools should be aware that acceptance of advantages from food suppliers such as cash rebates, gifts, favours or catering services for free or at reduced prices will likely result in a compromise in the quality of food provided for students and public criticism, and hence should be avoided.

17. Schools should observe the general principles on acceptance of advantages and donations set out in EDB Circulars on "Acceptance of Advantages and Donations by Schools and Their Staff" and "Trading Operations in Schools" currently in force. In this connection, schools should pay particular attention to the following principles:

- (a) As a rule, schools should not solicit or accept donations or advantages in any form from food suppliers.
- (b) Acceptance of donations or advantages from food suppliers should be considered only in very exceptional circumstances with justification of compelling reasons and should be approved by the school management committees/incorporated management committees in advance. At the same time, parents subscribing to and paying for the lunch service should be notified.
- (c) Schools should record such donations or advantages received together with the compelling reasons for such acceptance and the subsequent disposal in a register, which is subject to the inspection by EDB officers and should be made available to members of the public. Schools should also include the aforesaid details of donations in their School Reports.

18. It is noted that schools may require lunch box suppliers to provide back-up lunch boxes for refill and/or replacement purposes. Schools should be aware that the cost of such back-up lunch boxes will affect the bidding price of the suppliers. Hence, schools should set out a reasonable and justifiable number based on past experience of the actual need with a view to avoiding wastage and jetting up the bidding price. The back-up lunch boxes should not be consumed by staff and students not paying for the lunch boxes even if they have volunteered their service.

Participation of Parents

19. Schools may invite parents to participate in making decisions jointly on lunch and snacks arrangements and implement the school policy on healthy eating and green meals. Parents can support teachers and students to monitor the nutritional quality of school lunch and snacks on an ongoing basis. A lunch monitoring and feedback form has been developed by DH at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/doc/lunch_monitoring_feedback_form_tc.docx and a snack monitoring and feedback form at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/doc/snacks_monitoring_feedback_form_tc.doc for this purpose.

20. Parents' involvement is important in cultivating students' good eating habits and raising their environmental awareness. Schools are advised to communicate with parents on the nutritional value of lunch and snacks supplied by them. Schools should also enlist parents' collaboration in promoting the culture of healthy eating and green meals so as to improve the eating habits of students in school, at home and eating out.

Useful Information and Support

21. To facilitate and encourage primary schools to formulate and implement a school policy on healthy eating, establish a facilitating school environment to cultivate and strengthen healthy eating habits among students, DH has introduced an Accreditation Scheme. The Scheme aims to encourage collaboration among schools, parents and the community to formulate clear targets with a view to achieving the profile of a healthy school. Details of the Scheme are available at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/content_esas.aspx?id=6101.

22. To strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, DH periodically organizes training and briefing on food nutrition and meal arrangements for teachers, parents and food suppliers. Details of these activities can be found on the EatSmart@school.hk Campaign's thematic website (<https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/index.aspx>). Schools are also encouraged to visit the website of CFS on the latest food safety issues, e.g. food alert, seasonal food safety tips, etc. CFS also regularly organizes school talks on various food safety topics.

23. With a view to promoting green lunch in school, a separate circular providing advice on measures to reduce waste and minimize wastage will be issued. Schools should refer to the circular when developing policy and measures on healthy and green meals.

ENQUIRIES

24. For enquiries on meal arrangements at school, please contact the following officers/hotlines:

General enquiry on meal arrangements at school	Respective Senior School Development Officers
Control of licensed food factories supplying lunch boxes	FEHD Enquiry Hotline: 2868 0000 or Respective District Environmental Hygiene Offices
Health & nutrition, Accreditation Scheme	DH Central Health Education Unit: 2572 1476 Email : <i>support1_cheu@dh.gov.hk</i>
Green lunch	EPD Customer Service Hotline: 2838 3111
Food safety issues	Communication Resource Unit of CFS: 2381 6096

25. This circular supersedes EDB Circular No. 2/2008 dated 28 January 2008.

Miss P L WU
for Secretary for Education