

October 7, 2014

Healthy and Safe Food at School Events

School events and fundraisers where food is prepared, served, sold or eaten can be great ways to build healthy schools within healthy communities. Vancouver Coastal Health's (VCH) multi-disciplinary team of dietitians, environmental health officers, nurses, and physicians working with school-aged populations wants to help ensure that you obtain the community health benefits that food can provide at these events while also considering important issues such as nutrition, food safety and sustainability.

Nutrition

Healthy eating helps students learn better, feel better, and grow optimally. When planning school events, BC Schools are required to follow the 2013 "Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools" (<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/foodguidelines>). Helen Yeung, a VCH Public Health Dietitian, is available to meet with school staff, students, and parents to help promote healthy eating.

Food Safety

Preparing food for large numbers of people can be a challenge. If you are planning an event such as a back to school barbeque or multicultural lunch, where food is served to students, teachers and/or parents, you don't need to obtain a permit, but you may need advice to ensure the food is safe and unlikely to cause foodborne illness. If you have an event that is open to the public, such as a fundraiser or sports event, you will need to obtain a permit from VCH. A VCH Environmental Health Officer can advise on topics such as food preparation, temperature control, cross-contamination, hand washing, transportation of food to the school, food service at the event, and how to obtain a permit.

Sustainability

The North and West Vancouver School Districts recognized that we all play a role in promoting a healthy food system by signing the North Shore Food Charter (www.tablematters.ca/what-we-do/north-shore-food-charter). Steps you can take to promote a sustainable food system at school events include sourcing food from local businesses and asking for menu items that use seasonal and local/regional foods. Minimize waste going in the garbage by using reusable or compostable dishes. Food scraps and paper dishes can go in a green bin to be picked up by the municipality with the garbage or have students take their own waste home.

Coordination

Public Health Nurses work with school staff, parents, students and community groups to provide health services, deliver health education and to promote healthy school environments. This includes providing support in terms of planning healthy events and making sure you find the VCH resources you need.

Contact Information

VCH Public Health Dietitian, Helen Yeung, can be reached at Helen.Yeung@vch.ca or 604-904-6458.

VCH Public Health Nurses and Environmental Health Officers can be reached at 604-983-6700.

VCH is happy to provide information and resources so that schools can make healthy decisions and to partner with school administrators, staff, parents, and students to promote optimal health and learning.

Sincerely,



Mark Lysyshyn, MD, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer
Vancouver Coastal Health, North Shore