

Environmental Health Services Division

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1100
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-263-9566 Fax 206-296-0189

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov/health



August 2023

Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) supports school plans to create food share tables to make donated food available to children and to reduce waste. As a regulatory agency, one of Public Health’s roles is to assure that food donation is managed with food safety in mind. Any questions about how to set up food donation share tables may be addressed to Thu Bui, Public Health – Seattle & King County (thu.bui@kingcounty.gov or by phone at 206-477-8145) or Doug Dyer, Public Health – Seattle & King County (ddyer@kingcounty.gov or by phone at 206-263-1518) or Ian Miller, Public Health – Seattle & King County (ian.miller@kingcounty.gov or by phone at 206-477-7558).

BACKGROUND FOR FOOD DONATIONS FROM SCHOOL AND OTHER USDA NUTRITION PROGRAMS

On November 18, 2011, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act 2012 amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that provided statutory authority for schools and other USDA nutrition programs to have food recovery and donation policies. The statute clarifies that any food prepared, but not consumed may be donated to eligible local food banks or charitable organizations. The amendment defines eligible local food banks or charitable organizations to mean any food bank or charitable organization that is tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the *Internal Revenue Code* of 1986.

Further questions regarding food safety and donated foods can be directed to your facility investigator, or by contacting PHSKC at DFDOinfo@kingcounty.gov.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNAL SCHOOL DONATIONS (SHARE TABLES)

- School share tables should be limited to unopened school meal components (no homemade foods), unopened commercially packaged non-**Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food (TCS)**, and whole fruits in non-edible peels; limited to service during the current meal period (meaning all phases of each day’s lunchtime); and offered from a designated and labeled collection area. *Examples of items accepted on Share Tables include shelf-stable packaged snacks such as granola bars, dry snacks, dried fruit, nuts, etc. Acceptable fruits include those with inedible peels such as bananas and oranges (citrus) that are intact (have not been opened). Uneaten, whole apples and other fruits with edible skins are acceptable and may be placed on share tables for students to take only if they are rinsed prior to service and assessed for no damage to edible skin.
- Apples and other fruits with edible skins not rinsed by the school may be collected for donation to a nonprofit organization that has received a variance from Public Health-Seattle & King County to pick up foods and drinks previously served to students.
- Share table bins, containers, or collection areas must be at least six inches off the floor and clearly labeled. This can be accomplished by placing a share bin or container on a designated cart, counter, or table, or by placing the share bin or container on an empty milk crate or other sturdy surface that is six inches or more above the floor.
- TCS foods offered for table sharing may require a variance based on the proposed equipment and/or amount of time the food and drink products may be above required holding temperatures. TCS food examples include carton milk, individual yogurt containers, and individual portion string cheese. All packaging must be intact (not open) and free of damage. Unpacked (opened) TCS foods are not permitted. In general, all TCS foods must be maintained at 41 deg. F or below. This can be accomplished using mechanical refrigeration or ice packs that are correctly used. In some case, time control may be used; however, this requires a careful conversation between schools and Public Health-Seattle & King County representative to assess and minimize food safety risks. Time control requires record keeping and oversight that must be approved prior to implementing.

- If a variance is required, it will not include a fee, but instead will be a signed document stating how the school district or private school is allowing its school(s) to set up share tables and/or food donation. Such a document will provide Public Health-Seattle & King County field investigators with helpful, prior notice about share tables and food donation before school visits. You may contact PHSKC to request for the “Public Health – Seattle & King County Request for School Food Sharing Table” document.

- It is understood that each school food sharing program may be different depending on number of lunch periods, food service staffing, types of foods shared, and available equipment and financial resources. Therefore, it is important that school district food service representative meet with Public Health-Seattle & King County to review processes, equipment, food service times, and resources to develop food safety parameters.

For schools that already have share tables, the school district food service representative or private school kitchen manager is encouraged to contact Thu Bui, Doug Dyer or Ian Miller with Public Health-Seattle & King County, Food & Facilities program to discuss current practices. Public Health-Seattle & King County understands that previously set-up share tables did not have benefit of this current guidance document, but we will assist in discussing best practices.

The King County Green Schools Program is also available to assist schools to set up Share Tables and donation programs according to these considerations. That program provides milk crates, signs tailored to each district, assistance educating students about these programs, and other guidance as needed.

- Backpack Brigades and other food donations for school children to take home should be limited to school meal components or commercially packaged snack foods (no homemade foods). Backpack items with Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food (TCS) ingredients must be kept refrigerated at 41 deg. F, or below.

For more information:

- [Public Health-Seattle and King County Food Safety Program](https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/certificates-permits-licenses/food-business-permits)
<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/certificates-permits-licenses/food-business-permits>
- [Washington State Department of Health Charitable Food Guidelines](https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/food/food-worker-and-industry/charity-food-donations)
<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/food/food-worker-and-industry/charity-food-donations>
- [USDA Guidance on Food Donation in Child Nutrition Programs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp-05-2012-guidance-food-donation-program-child-nutrition-programs)
www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp-05-2012-guidance-food-donation-program-child-nutrition-programs
- [Department of Natural Resources and Reducing food waste in schools](https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/greenschools/waste-reduction/food-waste.aspx)
<https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/greenschools/waste-reduction/food-waste.aspx>

DISTRICT OFFICES

DOWNTOWN
401 5th Ave, 11th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104
206-263-9566

EASTGATE
14350 S.E. Eastgate Way
Bellevue, WA 98007
206-477-8050