



School Meal Programs

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 **Have schools in Manitoba already been reviewed by Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care's Health Protection Unit for nutrition programs?**

Many schools across Manitoba are already registered or have permits for their current meal programs. Any school wanting to offer a new meal program will need to first register with the Health Protection Unit.

2 **When is a health permit necessary?**

Health permits are required for any food service that involves food handling, storage, and service that poses a higher risk of food-borne illness. Your public health inspector will be able to determine if this is required after reviewing your proposed menu items and method of food service.

3 **What is the process to receive approval for a school meal program?**

The school principal or the meal program coordinator can complete the application and email it along with a copy of the proposed menu, kitchen equipment layout drawing, and Certified Food Handler certificate to healthprotection@gov.mb.ca. The application will be reviewed by a public health inspector who will schedule a consultation visit at the school to see what food handling can occur.

The level of food handling allowed will depend on factors that are unique to each school, based on the school's facility and the intended menu. For a full menu with higher risk foods, the public health inspector will be looking at requirements such as dishwashing capacity, ventilation, hot and cold food storage, and surfaces that can withstand frequent cleaning and sanitizing. For a school program with a limited menu, the registration process is all that will be required.

4 What is the difference between a limited menu and a full menu?

Limited menu examples: Schools offer meals or snacks that require little to no food handling, such as crackers, cheese, pickles, muffins, simple reheating of frozen pre-made items and minimal cutting of fruits and vegetables. A limited menu also includes prepackaged food such as cheese strings; individual yogurts, milks, and granola bars. These limited menu items will not require a permit, and the meal program will only need to be registered.

Full menu examples: The menu requires food handling and food handler training/knowledge. This includes preparing and cooking raw meats and other potentially hazardous foods. Knowledge of safe methods of thawing, cooking to proper temperatures, reheating, hot and cold holding, food storage, and service of potentially hazardous foods is required. A menu with meals that include cutting, chopping, mixing, and cooking potentially hazardous foods such as scrambled eggs, sausage, spaghetti, sandwiches, hamburgers, tacos, stews, and perogies would require a health permit. The inspector will verify as part of the permitting process that the dishwashing equipment, hot and cold food storage, refrigerator temperatures, ventilation system, and so on are approved for use.

5a How many people are required to have a Certified Food Handler certificate in each school with a nutrition program?

If your school meal program has a health permit in the City of Winnipeg, at least one person must have their Certified Food Handler certificate. Programs with more than five food handlers working at any one time must have one person with their Certified Food Handler certificate present. In other regions and municipalities, it is strongly recommended that a food handler who is certified is on site when food is being prepared. If there is no health permit issued, there is no requirement.

5b If schools do not have anyone with a Certified Food Handler certificate, how will they be supported to obtain this?

The Certified Food Handler training course is offered by many contractors throughout the province, both online and in person. The certificate is valid for five (5) years. The list of approved food handling courses in Manitoba can be found at this website: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/environmentalhealth/protection/foodsafety.html>.

6a How will schools be supported in working toward determining and meeting all of the public health requirements (i.e., for limited or full menu)?

Your public health inspector will be able to guide you on the type of food preparation and service your school can provide based on the kitchen equipment and proposed menu.

Further guidance and direction can be given for equipment upgrades if you would like to provide higher risk food handling such as changing a limited menu to one that requires the preparation of potentially hazardous foods. Other changes may include a menu with additional food items that require deep frying or produce extensive vapours, when an approved ventilation system is installed.

6b How long will schools have to ensure all the public health requirements are in place?

If all public health requirements cannot be met in a timely manner for a full menu service, a limited menu will be approved to ensure that a nutritious meal program can be implemented for all students in Manitoba.

7 How are schools able to maintain flexibility in their menus to change and adapt throughout the year?

Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care's Health Protection Unit supports the food programs being implemented across the province. Your public health inspector can guide you through acceptable menu items that are considered low risk while any upgrades to the food preparation areas are made during the year to meet the requirements for higher risk foods.

For any planned menu changes to a full menu, it is important to notify the public health inspector prior to the change and to request an inspection to ensure that the kitchen meets all requirements in accordance with the provincial Food and Food Handling Establishments Regulation so that a health permit can be obtained.

8 How can schools find out who the public health inspector is in their area?

Send a message to Health Protection Unit's intake email at healthprotection@gov.mb.ca or call 1-204-945-4204 to request contact with your local [public health inspector](#).