

MEMORANDUM

To: City/County Directors of Environmental Health
District Directors

From: Brian M. Miner, Director *BM*
Bureau of Community Environmental Health and Food Protection

Date: April 13, 2016

Subject: Sharing Tables at School Food Services

In an effort to reduce food waste, many school food service operations have established “sharing tables” where students can leave unwanted foods and beverages for other students can take at no cost to them. However, the use of sharing tables has generated concerns regarding the reservice of foods, and the adequate protection of foods left on sharing tables.

As a result of numerous inquiries by local health departments and school food service operators, the Department of Health and New York State Education Department (NYSED) developed the attached document providing information on the safe use of sharing tables. NYSED will also distribute the information to their field staff, as well as school food service operators.

If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Field Coordinator or Darby Greco at 518-402-7600.

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SHARING TABLES

FOOD SAFETY AT SHARING TABLES

In an effort to reduce the amount of food waste and encourage the consumption of food served, many schools have established 'sharing tables.' Sharing tables are tables where children can place unconsumed food and beverage items that they choose not to eat or drink. This allows other children the opportunity to take additional helpings of these food items at no additional cost.

Although Part 14 of the State Sanitary Code prohibits the re-service of food that has already been exposed to consumer or other forms of contamination, foods that are protected from contamination and immediately donated following the guidance below are not considered previously served.

To ensure the safety of food and drink items placed on sharing tables, the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Education Department developed the following guidance pertaining to sharing tables. School food service operators should consult with their local health departments to discuss any additional requirements.

Sharing tables can safely be implemented provided the following conditions are met:

- Food items are protected from contamination (wrapped in plastic wrap or in covered containers); fruits requiring peeling (e.g. oranges) are considered protected
- The sharing table is supervised by a school food service staff person
- Students must leave unwanted food items on the sharing table before sitting down to eat
- The use of a sharing table is included in the school's standard operating procedures and food safety plan
- Time/temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods placed on the sharing table must be held under temperature control or (with a Time as a Public Health Control (TPHC) waiver from the local health department) discarded at the end of the lunch service (not more than four hours)
- Donated food may not be returned to the kitchen and sold again