

Share Tables at Schools

This document provides guidance on the food safety management of foods shared at schools on a Share Table.

What is a Share Table?

Share Tables are tables in students' common eating areas where students can leave their unwanted, pre-packaged, non-perishable food items for other students who might like additional food to eat. The California Department of Education created a guidance document regarding Share Tables:

Dept. of Education Document (2018) - <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbcnp032018.asp>

What foods are permissible on a Share Table?

All pre-packaged, non-potentially hazardous food products (i.e., pre-packaged cookies or crackers) where the packaging is not intended to be consumed and fruits (i.e., whole bananas or oranges) that do **NOT** require to be washed or wiped down are permissible on a Share Table.

“Pre-packaged” food items where the “packaging” is natural and is intended to be consumed (i.e., whole apples, pears, etc.), which have been handled by students and placed on a Share Table, must be re-washed before being offered for consumption. These items should be carefully inspected to ensure that they are not cut or punctured, or that the skin is not otherwise compromised before it is placed on the Share Table or re-served to students.



Unopened, individual containers of commercially processed dairy products (i.e., yogurt, string cheese, milk, etc.) maintained under temperature control **CAN** be rescued if immediately placed on ice on the Share Table. Temperature control may include, for example, a large container of ice where the unopened milk cartons can be placed for other students to take. When not held under temperature control, they may be maintained under “Time as a Public Health Control.” Participating schools must have and maintain written procedures that have been approved by the local Environmental Health Division and are being strictly followed per Cal Code Section 114000.

Supervision of Share Tables

Share Tables must be supervised by a responsible person who is educated on food safety principles. The responsible person overseeing the Share Tables at middle and high schools may be students who volunteer for the task. This person will be responsible for ensuring that only allowable foods are placed on the Share Tables. Also, the designated person will be responsible to ensure that fruits with edible flesh, such as apples and pears, are placed into separate bins from the pre-packaged foods and fruits, to be sent back to the kitchen for washing prior to re-serving to the students.



🍎 **Monitoring and food safety at Share Tables**

Because of the short time limitations of the lunch period, food safety concerns are lessened in some respects. Schools can elect to address food safety concerns by either maintaining temperature control throughout the “life” of the food product or by means of the time-temperature relationship using short time durations under ambient temperatures instead of stricter temperature controls. Both options are discussed below and can be used to fit a school’s needs.

🍎 Strict Temperature Control

Unopened containers of dairy products must be maintained under proper refrigeration at or below 45°F. As long as the food products are immediately returned to strict temperature control after service (such as ice baths on the Share Table), the unopened dairy products may be offered on the Share Tables. Bins with ice may be provided for the Share Table to maintain the dairy products at 45°F or below.

🍎 TPHC

“Time as a Public Health Control,” or TPHC, relies on succinct timing to maintain food safety versus relying on any temperature control. Color-coded coolers or food bins may be used as a tool to keep track of the time the dairy products have been at ambient temperature. Care must be taken to incorporate the length of time of the lunch service, since the dairy products may have been out at ambient temperature when first served to a student. The schools will be responsible for providing procedures and time marking to reflect the proper implementation of TPHC as required under Cal Code Section 114000, and the procedures must be approved by the Environmental Health Division.

