

GUIDELINES

NUTRITION, FOOD AND BEVERAGE REQUIREMENTS IN PRESCHOOL

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Target Audience:	Principals, preschool teachers and educators, parents, pre-service teachers, students and volunteers	

This document should be read in conjunction with the [Anaphylaxis management in schools guidelines](#) and the [School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines](#).

1. INTRODUCTION

The early years are an important time for establishing lifelong, healthy eating habits. Healthy eating maximises growth, development, provides children with enough energy to play and learn and contributes to minimising the risk of illness.

Under the [Education and Care Services \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act](#) (the Act) and [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#) (the Regulations) preschools must ensure:

- children have access to safe drinking water at all times and are regularly offered food and beverages throughout the day;
- the service implements healthy, hygienic and safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food, including food and beverages provided by the family; and
- the food and beverages provided are nutritious, adequate in quantity and have regard for the dietary requirements of individual children.

2. DEFINITIONS

Children, for the purpose of these guidelines, refers to children enrolled in and attending preschool.

Dietary requirements refers to a child's allergy, cultural, religious or medical condition that requires special consideration in planning and providing food and beverages.

Parent, for the purpose of these guidelines, refers to a child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal and Torres Strait customary law or tradition.

Volunteer is a person who supports educational programs of preschools either through direct contact with the children or through the activities, without financial gain or reward.

Student, for the purposes of these guidelines, refers to a school age child, typically enrolled in secondary school, undertaking work experience at a preschool, as part of their studies.

Pre-service teacher is a person undertaking a practicum placement as part of a recognised teacher qualification and who is supported by an educational institution in the completion of his/her placement.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principal must ensure:

- the preschool is compliant with the regulatory requirements under the Act and Regulations by implementing the required procedures; and
- preschool children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form and/or medical management plan, are managed and catered for.

Preschool teacher and educators are responsible for:

- ensuring the preschool complies with regulatory requirements under the Act and Regulations and departmental guidelines and procedures;
- ensuring the preschool develops and implements processes for ensuring children have access to safe drinking water at all times, and are regularly offered food and beverages throughout the day;
- ensuring the healthy, hygienic and safe handling, preparation and storing of food and beverages, including food and beverages provided by the family; and
- ensuring preschool children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form and/or medical management plan, are managed and catered for.

4. GUIDELINES

The Act and Regulations aim to promote healthy eating and good nutrition when any activities or programs relating to or involving the provision of food and/or beverages. Under this regulatory framework, preschools must:

- ensure children have access to, and are encouraged to access independently, safe drinking water at all times;
- make meal times relaxed and pleasant and timed to meet the needs of children;
- provide children, who do not eat during routine meal times, or children who are hungry, with opportunities to consume food at alternative times;
- in consultation with the child's family, develop strategies to manage a child's allergy, cultural, religious or medical condition that requires special dietary consideration, as indicated in his/her enrolment form and/or medical management plan;
- ensure all staff, volunteers, pre-service teachers and students are made aware of the children who have a food allergy, or cultural, religious and health dietary requirements and those individual requirements;
- display copies of children's special dietary requirements or medical management plans in a location that is visible to teachers, educators, pre-service teachers, students and volunteers;
- facilitate general awareness of allergies and special dietary needs being managed by the preschool, as appropriate;
- provide opportunities for families to update dietary information about their child;
- implement healthy, hygienic and safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food and beverages, including food and beverages provided by the family; and

DoE Guidelines: *Nutrition, food and beverage requirements in preschool*

- if the preschool provides food and/or beverages (other than water), ensure that:
 - food and beverages are nutritious, adequate in quantity and have regard for the dietary requirements of individual children, including their growth and development needs and any cultural, religious or health requirements;
 - food is consistent with national guidelines and standards on early childhood nutrition, menu planning and food safety; and
 - a weekly menu is displayed in a place that is accessible to parents and accurately describes the food and beverages to be provided by the preschool each day.

In addition to these regulatory requirements preschools may also consider (but not limited to) how they:

- encourage parents to provide healthy food choices for their children's snacks and lunches;
- store, handle, prepare and/or serve food and beverages, including food supplied by children's families;
- develop site specific procedures for managing instances when a parent has not provided or has forgotten to provide his/her child with food and beverages;
- make conversation about healthy food choices and use language such as 'sometimes' and 'everyday' food to reinforce the importance of a balanced diet;
- encourage teachers, educators, pre-service teachers, students, volunteers and parents to adopt healthy eating behaviours;
- facilitate awareness of and exposure to concepts of healthy eating habits, foods from different cultures, eating styles and related food values;
- incorporate discussions and activities about healthy eating and caring for their bodies into children's every day activities;
- may provide educators with opportunities to receive training in nutrition, food safety, including managing allergies, and awareness about food practices in other cultures and religions; and
- if food and/or beverages (other than water) are provided by the preschool:
 - ensure families have access to daily information about their child's food and beverage intake and related experiences; and
 - provide parents with opportunities to contribute to the development of the preschools menu, recipes, articles in newsletters, nutrition information sheets, and special event days and celebrations.