

Nutrition, food, beverages and dietary requirements in preschool – policy and procedure

Department of Education and Training

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Read this document with the School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines.

1. Policy statement

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

The *Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* adopts the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (Vic) (National Law) and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (NSW) (National Regulations) in the Northern Territory.

Under the National Law and the National Regulations preschools must ensure:

- children always have access to safe drinking water and are regularly offered food and beverages throughout the day
- the service implements safe, hygienic and healthy practices for handling, preparing and storing food, including food and beverages provided by the family
- the food and beverages provided are nutritious, adequate in quantity and have regard for the dietary requirements of individual children
- where food and beverages are provided by the preschool, a weekly menu is developed and displayed.

This Department of Education and Training (department) policy and procedure along with the department's School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines, are to be followed by preschool staff to ensure that the dietary requirements and nutritional needs of all children attending their preschool are being met.

The Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services is another key resource for preschools to refer to for food safety practices.

2. Procedures

2.1. Drinking Water

- Preschool staff must ensure that children have access to fresh drinking water and clean cups, water bottles or bubblers at all times and are encouraged to drink water independently throughout the day
- Where children bring water bottles to preschool, they must be returned home regularly for cleaning, or the preschool ensures a process is in place for cleaning water bottles
- Bubblers, if used by the preschool, must be regularly cleaned and kept in good working order
- Children must be discouraged from sharing water bottles or cups to prevent the spread of viruses.

2.2. Food and beverages

- The preschool will provide a relaxed, pleasant and clean environment for children to sit and eat meals, and preschool staff will supervise children during mealtimes to ensure all children eat and drink.

- Preschool staff, where possible, will sit with children to eat and promote positive discussion about the food being eaten including healthy food choices and food from different cultures.
- Children who do not eat during routine mealtimes, will be encouraged to join the other children and be provided with opportunities to consume food at alternative times.
- Hygiene practices will be implemented to ensure that:
 - children and staff wash and dry their hands before and after eating
 - uneaten food and beverages are disposed of, or stored appropriately
 - the children's eating area is cleaned after each mealtime.

2.2.1. Food brought from home

- When a parent has not provided, or has forgotten to provide, their child with food and beverages, the preschool will ensure that the child is provided with food and beverages that are nutritious, adequate in quantity and accommodates any specific dietary requirements.
- Hygienic facilities will be provided to store children's food and beverages, including refrigeration.
- A cleaning schedule will be implemented for all food storage facilities. Note: all cleaning products must be kept in a locked cabinet out of reach of children.
- If the preschool has the facilities and can reheat food that children have brought from home, noting that this is not required of preschools, then the following procedure should be followed:
 - food should be reheated until it reaches 70°C
 - use a non-mercury food thermometer to test the temperature
 - check that the food has cooled before giving to the child
 - remove a small piece of food with a spoon to another plate and test the temperature with your hand, then dispose of this piece of food
 - do not reheat food a subsequent time or return that food to parents
 - dispose of leftovers and advise parents about the uneaten food that was disposed of.

2.2.2. Food provided by the preschool or school

- Preschools that provide food or beverages, other than water, must follow the department's School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines.
- Additionally, all food provided by the school will be handled, prepared and stored using safe, hygienic and healthy practices in accordance with Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services.

2.2.3. Weekly menu

In the case that food and beverages are provided by the preschool, the following must be adhered to:

- The preschool teacher must ensure that the weekly menu is developed with input from children and the staff who are responsible for food preparation.
- Strategies should be implemented to encourage families to suggest ideas and recipes for consideration in the planning of the menu.

- The needs of children with special dietary requirements must be considered in the development of the menu with individual meals being provided if necessary.
- The weekly menu must be displayed in a place that is accessible to parents and accurately describes the food and beverages to be provided by the preschool each day, including meals accommodating special dietary requirements.

2.3. Managing special dietary requirements

- The Managing health care needs in preschool guidelines must be followed to manage special dietary requirements.
- The preschool teacher must consult with a child's family to develop strategies to manage that child's allergy, cultural, religious or medical condition that requires special dietary consideration, as indicated in the child's enrolment form or preschool health care plan.
- The needs of children who have a food allergy, or cultural, religious and health dietary requirements must be communicated to all preschool staff and staff who prepare food for the preschool.
- Copies of children's special dietary requirements or preschool health care plans must be stored in a location that is readily available to all preschool staff.
- Parents will be made aware of how they can update information about their children's dietary requirements.
- The preschool teacher will implement general awareness strategies to ensure staff, families and children are aware of the strategies in place to manage allergies and special dietary needs of children in the preschool.

2.4. Education

- The school or preschool will provide parents with regular updates and support materials via school newsletters or websites to better support children and families with food and drink choices. Newsletter inserts and tips for parents are provided on the department's School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines webpage to assist.
- The preschool teacher will incorporate awareness of and exposure to concepts of healthy eating habits, foods from different cultures, eating styles and related food values into the education program.
- Preschool staff will encourage discussions with and among children about healthy eating and caring for their bodies, particularly during mealtimes.
- Cooking experiences may be included in the educational program to provide children with opportunities to develop their language, motor skills and science and math skills such as measuring, as well as exposing them to hygiene and healthy eating practices.
- The preschool may hold celebrations that incorporate experiences with food including cultural food days.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1. Principals

Principals hold the responsibilities of the nominated supervisor and therefore must:

- ensure their preschool operates in accordance with the National Law, National Regulations and the department's policies, including these procedures
- ensure their preschool is provided with the resources to meet the responsibilities outlined in these procedures
- ensure preschool children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or medical management plan, are managed and catered for.

3.2. Preschool teachers and educators

Preschool teachers and educators must:

- ensure they operate the preschool in accordance with the National Law, National Regulations and the department's policies, including these procedures
- ensure the preschool implements processes for ensuring children always have access to safe drinking water throughout the day
- ensure the safe, hygienic and healthy handling, preparation and storage of food and beverages, including those provided by a child's family
- ensure preschool children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or medical management plan, are managed and catered for.

3.3. Parents

Parents must:

- notify the preschool of their children's special dietary requirements upon enrolment and when any changes occur
- provide their children with food and beverages that are nutritious and adequate in quantity for the duration of their children's attendance at the service
- regularly clean any water bottles brought to the preschool by their children.

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
Approved provider	A person or legal entity who holds a provider approval under the National Quality Framework (NQF). This approval is a prerequisite for a provider before commencing to operate an approved education and care service. The Department of Education and Training (department) is the approved provider of all Northern Territory (NT) Government preschools. Responsibility for this role has been delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive Schools.
Children	For the purposes of these guidelines, refers to children enrolled in and attending preschool.
Dietary requirements	Refers to a child's allergy, medical condition or religious and cultural requirements that require special consideration in planning and providing food and beverages.
Nominated supervisor	A person nominated by the approved provider responsible for the day-to-day management of an education and care service. In a Northern Territory Government preschool, this is the school principal.
Parent	For the purposes of these guidelines, refers to a child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for that child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal and Torres Strait customary law or tradition.
Preschool staff	Refers to preschool teachers, assistant teachers and any other person engaged to contribute to the delivery of education and care to children attending the preschool.

5. Legislation, policy, resources and documents

5.1. Legislation

Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 (NT) is the legislation that adopts the National Law in the NT - <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/EDUCATION-AND-CARE-SERVICES-NATIONAL-UNIFORM-LEGISLATION-ACT-2011>

The Schedule to the Education and Care Services sets out the National Law - <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010>

Education and Care Services National Regulations - <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2011-0653>

- Regulation 77 - Health, hygiene and safe food practice
- Regulation 78 - Food and beverages
- Regulation 79 - Service providing food and beverages
- Regulation 80 - Weekly menu
- Regulation 90 - Medical conditions policy
- Regulation 162 - Health information to be kept on enrolment record
- Regulation 168 - Education and care services must have policies and procedures

- (2)(a)(i) nutrition, food and beverages, dietary requirements
- Regulation 170 – Policies and procedures to be followed
- Regulation 171 – Policies and procedures to be kept available
- Regulation 172 – Notification of change to policies and procedures

5.2. Policy, guidelines, procedures and supporting resources

Managing health care needs in preschool guidelines - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care/preschool-specific-policy>

School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/4327>

Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services - <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/staying-healthy-guidelines>

5.3. National Quality Standard

ACECQA National quality standard – <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>

- Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety
 - Element 2.1.2 – Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented
 - Element 2.1.3 – Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child.
- Quality Area 7 – Governance and leadership
 - Element 7.1.2 – Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management

Acronyms	Full form
ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
NQA ITS	National Quality Agenda Information Technology System
NQF	National Quality Framework
NT	Northern Territory
QECNT	Quality Education and Care Northern Territory

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3.3	March 2022	Early Childhood Policy and Programs	Updated to a policy and procedural document
3.4	August 2025	Early Childhood	Updated to latest template and minor updates to links.
3.5	July 2026	Operational Policy unit	A full review of this policy and procedure has been conducted. The content is legislatively current. Document update included a current template and minor administrative amendments.