County of San Diego • Department of Environmental Health

Share Tables at Schools

Promoting Safe and Thriving Communities

This document will provide 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 student common eating areas where students can take their unwanted pre-packaged non-perishable foods and leave the items for other students who might feel they would like more food to eat in addition to what was part of their required serving. The California Department of Education created a guidance document regarding "Sharing Tables" (2008, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbnsdsnp052008.asp?print=yes). While the document needs to be updated to reflect changes in Cal Code since its creation, the information in the current guidance document supports food safety principles and practices.

What foods are permissible on a Share Table?

All pre-packaged non-potentially hazardous food products and fruits where the packaging is not intended to be consumed, such as whole bananas, oranges or pre-packaged cookies or crackers that do **NOT** require to be washed or wiped down. "Pre-packaged" food items, where the "packaging" is natural and is intended to be consumed, such as whole apples, pears, etc. that 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, punctured or that the skin is not otherwise compromised before it is placed on the share table or reserved to students.

Unopened individual cartons of milk maintained under temperature control **CAN** be rescued and if immediately placed on ice on the share table for other students who may want it. An example of temperature control may include a large container of ice where the unopened milk cartons can be placed on for other students to take. When not held under temperature control, they may be maintained under "Time as a Public Health Control". The participating schools must have and maintain written procedures that are being strictly followed. (Section 114000).

Monitoring and food safety at Share Tables?

Because of the short time limitations of the lunch period, food safety concerns are lessened in some aspects. Schools can elect to address food safety concerns by either maintaining temperature control throughout the "life" of the food product or choose to use 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 cartons of milk 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 milk cartons may be offered on the share tables for those who want it. Bins with ice may be provided for the Share Table to maintain the milk cartons at 45°F or below.

TPHC

Time as a Public Health Control or "TPHC" relies on succinct timing in order to maintain food safety versus relying on any temperature control. Color coded coolers or food bins may be used as a tool to maintain track of the time the milk containers have been at ambient temperature. Care must be taken to incorporate the length of time of the lunch service when the milk carton may have been out at ambient temperature when first served to a student. The schools will be responsible to provide procedures and time marking to reflect the proper implementation of TPHC as required under §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 to ensure that only allowable foods are placed on the share tables. Also, they will be responsible to ensure that fruits with edible flesh such as apples and pears are placed into separate bins from the other pre-packaged foods and fruits so that they will be sent back to the kitchen for washing prior to re-serving to the students.