COVID - 19 Guidance for Food at Work

Intent: During the COVID-19 pandemic, some departments have employees who continue to work on campus under altered work arrangements. In an effort to maintain morale, workers and managers may want to bring in food or beverages. While the motivation for this is sound, it may be inadvertently increasing the COVID risk in the work environment. The intent of this document is to provide best-practices guidance in relation to sharing food and beverages in UBC work environments.

Visit ubc.ca/covid19 and https://ok.ubc.ca/covid19/ for more information about UBC’s response to COVID-19, including frequently asked questions.

Globally, our scientific knowledge surrounding COVID-19 is changing and expanding daily. This document is based on current scientific knowledge at the time of writing.

Food in the Workplace: The Risk
The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) indicates that there is currently no evidence to suggest that food is a likely source or route of transmission of COVID-19. However, unlike other objects in the workplace food and drink provide a direct route into your body. Just like a toothbrush, you should protect your food and be aware of the path it takes before you eat it.

Food produced professionally at restaurants, coffee shops and cafes are subject to safe work plans and food safe requirements. Food produced or brought from home is not subject to the same rigorous controls and standards. Further, food prepared at home provides a transmission hazard from other people living within the household who are not present in the work environment.

People infected by COVID-19 can transmit the illness in the 48 hours prior to having symptoms. Once in the workplace, communal food can be touched, breathed on sneezed on or interfered with by other occupants. Allowing potentially infected people to contact items intended for consumption offers risk. It provides a direct path for the virus into your body.

Other options for Expressing Appreciation
Rather than bringing in food / beverages, workers may want to consider other ways of showing appreciation and caring during this time. Some suggested options may include:

1. Walking to food service location and allowing people to order their own treat.
2. Bringing in flowers or plants.
3. Sending an electronic note, funny photo or tasteful joke to express gratitude.
4. Providing a pocket sized hand sanitizer

Food in the Workplace: Safer Sharing

Should you choose to bring in food and beverages, please consider the following guidance:

1. Home made food: Do not bring homemade food or beverages for sharing.
2. **Purchasing shared food:** Food purchased should be individually wrapped. If not individually wrapped, assign one person, using tongs and a mask to distribute the food onto personal plates or disposable napkins.

3. **Eating purchased food:** When opening food you did not bring yourself:
   a. Open the container / bag to expose the food.
   b. Wash or sanitize your hands.
   c. Do not allow the food to touch the outside of the container or uncleaned surfaces.

4. **Cutlery and Dishware:** Ineffectively cleaned / sanitized cutlery and dishware also provides a direct route into your body. Please follow these guidelines:
   a. Using cutlery and dishware from your own home is the safest choice. Bring it home with you at the end of the day. This is also a more environmentally conscious choice.
   b. Disposable cutlery and dishware can also be a safer choice, but carries an environmental burden.
   c. Some areas on campus have their own supply of cutlery and dishware. Ensure that these items are cleaned in a disinfecting dishwasher or disinfected prior to re-use. Individuals emptying a dishwasher should practice hand hygiene prior to putting dishes away and wear a mask to prevent accidental contamination.
   d. Avoid the re-use of hand washed cutlery by different people. In an office where dishwashers are not present, consider having people wash their own cutlery and storing at their own workstation between uses.

5. **Dishtowels:** The use of re-usable dishtowels represents a chance for cross contamination between users. During this time, use disposable towels to clean dishware and glassware or keep a towel at your own workspace for individual use.

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**Using Campus Kitchens / Lounges**

1. Follow posted occupancy limits and behavioural expectations.
2. Clean up after yourself using the supplied sanitizer / disinfectant. If you need cleaning supplies, please contact Facilities Management.

Additional infection control guidance can be located at:

[https://hse.ok.ubc.ca/covid19infectioncontrol/](https://hse.ok.ubc.ca/covid19infectioncontrol/)