

Nutrition, Food, Beverages & Dietary Requirements

Background

ECMS understands it has a duty of care to ensure that children's nutritional needs are met and food is prepared, stored and served safely within all education and care services.

Good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play and leisure. All children have the right to develop to their full potential in an environment which provides for their health and wellbeing.

We believe that by teaching children to eat wisely and moderately we are supporting them to invest in their future health. Studies show that the habits that children learn during their first five years will significantly affect their future health. A good nutritional program can provide a means of learning for life. Nutrition in childhood influences growth, activity, intellectual and emotional development.

The overall nutrition of children ultimately remains a parental responsibility. However, it is essential that ECMS Early Learning Centres provide adequate nutrition proportionate to the time the children spend in our care. Children in Early Learning and Care may receive 50-80% of the food intake whilst in our care. Our ELCs are required to ensure children are provided with at least 50% of the recommended daily intake of nutrients.

Appropriate strategies need to be implemented for children with special dietary needs and cultural food requirements. Children are especially prone to food borne illness because their immune systems are still developing and they cannot fight infection as well as adults can. The main causes of food borne illness are inadequate cooking; improper holding temperatures, contaminated equipment; unsafe food sources; and poor personal hygiene.

The Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 requires that approved provider/nominated supervisor/centre directors take reasonable care to protect children from foreseeable risk of harm, injury and infection.

In ECMS kindergartens, families are encouraged to send healthy snacks and lunches with their children.

Purpose

Foods provided will be based on the food groups recommended by the [Australian Guide to Healthy Eating](#)¹. We encourage children, families and our staff to follow this guide. We are committed to providing and encouraging food and beverages that:

- Are nutritious and adequate in quantity

¹ The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGTHE) is produced by the Australian Government and is one of the best ways to show healthy eating guidelines. The AGTHE shows the different food groups and indicates how much food from each food group should be eaten

- Are chosen having regard to the dietary requirements of individual children taking into account
 - each child's growth and development needs; and
 - any specific cultural, religious, dietary or health requirements

All educators and staff will follow safe food handling practices and hygiene practices and support children to do the same at all times. Please refer to **Operations 2.5 Food Handling & Preparation**.

Mealtimes will be used as social experiences and as an opportunity to develop self-help skills, sound hygiene practices and to learn about healthy food choices and healthy eating habits

Nuts

Our early education and care services are all nut free. This means we accept no food product into the service that contains nuts. Staff are also required to adhere to this policy in relation to food that they bring from home.

Principles

ECMS:

- Is a strong advocate for a child's right to understand about their own health and wellbeing, through an emphasis on nutrition, health programs and positive role modeling and guidance
- Respects the role of educators; their values and expectations will be considered when implementing providing information, assistance and training
- Values and nurtures the learning environments for the children and their families
- Responds to the specific needs of the children we serve; each child will be considered when planning and providing food and beverages
- Provides access to resources and opportunities for learning
- Look for opportunities to share, to listen, to enjoy, to understand, to welcome and value all families and believe that mealtimes are an important part of building our community
- Ensures the commitment to nutrition is clear and shared by all
- Educates educators, students and volunteers about nutrition and safe food handling and the importance of ongoing professional development.
- ECMS consults with educators, children, families and relevant health agencies to ensure the delivery of a high quality diet to children attending.
- Families are encouraged to liaise with the educators and staff to ensure special dietary requirements are catered for and modified meals are prepared for the children with allergies, sensitivities, intolerances or preferences.
- ECMS endeavours to take into account the cultural and religious needs of each of the children and families attending. Culturally diverse meal times and food are embedded into the program, promoting awareness of the diversity of food and its meaning in different cultures.
- Food will not be used in any way to influence behaviour or encourage children to do things. Food will be available most of the time the programs are running and children will be offered a variety to encourage decision-making and choice.
- ECMS endeavours to provide access to education and information to families and children around the importance of a healthy diet and the dietary needs of young children. Cooking will be part of the activities in programs for children.
- Ensure water is readily available for children to drink throughout the day.

Roles and responsibilities

The nominated supervisor/centre director and cooks will:

- Ensure the service operates in line with Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 in relation to provision of nutritious food and beverages and responsible food handling
- Ensure educators and staff undertake appropriate training in [food handling](#). (This course takes approximately one hour and provides the educator with a certificate)
- Allocate appropriate budget/resources to provide for each child's daily nutritional needs and training for food handlers
- Develop a menu that meets the requirements of the AGTHE.
- Develop a process that identifies children with special dietary requirements to ensure that they receive meals that meet these and can be distributed safely
- Develop and implement guidelines/checklists for addressing issues/practices that do not meet required standards
- Oversee and guide staff to ensure adherence to policy

Educators will:

- Encourage communication with families about the provision of appropriate healthy food and drinks for children while they are attending the service
- Encourage and support breastfeeding and appropriate introduction of solid foods
- Promote healthy food and drinks based on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating and the Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents
- Provide food to children that has been stored, prepared and served in a safe and hygienic manner and to promote hygienic food practices
- Provide a positive eating environment which reflects cultural diversity and family values
- Undertake appropriate professional development specific to food handling and the health, safety and wellbeing of children they care for
- Ensure regular open two way communication with families
- Ensure children are allowed to eat at their own pace
- Respect the food preferences of children
- Monitor provision of food to children with food allergies and follow special diets
- Provide appetising, colourful food; opportunities to try new foods
- Maintain regular mealtimes
- Ensure satisfaction of hunger of children between meals

Parents/Guardians will:

- Be aware of the Nutrition and Food Handling policy and procedures
- Feel confident that their child's nutrition requirement is being assured, and that the service is a safe place
- Have the confidence that the service is regularly monitored and supported according to the legislation requirements
- Be confident that the educator has the relevant training and experience to ensure their child's welfare and development
- Be confident that their religious and cultural beliefs and practices and lifestyle choices in relation to food are respected
- Provide input and feedback about what and when their child eats

Procedures

The Nominated Supervisor/Educators will:

- Request that details of any food allergies or intolerances or specific dietary requirements be provided to the service and work in partnership with families to develop an appropriate response so that children's individual dietary needs are met.
- Ensure that each child's food allergies, intolerances and preferences are clearly documented and communicated to the Centre cook and educators
- Communicate regularly with families about food and nutrition related experiences within the service and provide up to date information to assist families to provide healthy food choices at home.
- Kindergarten - Communicate regularly with families and provide information and advice on appropriate food and drink to be included in children's lunchboxes. This information may be provided to families in a variety of ways including newsletters, during orientation, information sessions and informal discussion.
- Ensure families are provided with opportunities to contribute to the review and development of the policy.

Educators/Staff:

- Who are directly involved in food preparation, undertake Food Safety Supervisor, Nutrition and Hygiene training as deemed necessary by Department of Human Services & Food Safety Audit recommendations.
- Who are involved in food handling and serving undertake yearly informal food safety, nutrition and hygiene training from Food Safety Supervisors via staff meetings.

Breastfeeding and Breast Milk

Educators / Staff will:

- Provide a suitable place within the service where mothers can breastfeed their babies or express breastmilk.
- Support mothers to continue breastfeeding until babies are at least 12 months of age while, in consultation with parents offering [appropriate complementary foods from around 4-6 months of age](#).
- Ensure the safe handling of breastmilk and infant formula including transporting, storing, thawing, warming, preparing and bottle feeding.
- In consultation with families, offer cooled pre-boiled water as an additional drink from around 6 months of age.
- Where breastfeeding is discontinued before 12 months of age, substitute with a commercial infant formula as stated by the parents.
- Always bottle feed babies by holding baby in a semi-upright position.
- Always supervise babies while drinking and eating - ensuring safe bottle feeding and eating practices at all times.

Infant formula and Expressed Breast Milk (EBM)

Management of Expressed Breast Milk

- Parents may choose to supply expressed breast milk for their child while in child care or they may choose to come to the service to breast feed their child
- Parents wishing to attend the service to feed their child will be encouraged and supported to do so
- Additional support can be sought from the Australian Breastfeeding Association (Victorian Branch) on 9791 4644

- When expressing breastmilk, mothers should:
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water
- If using a breast pump, sterilise it according to the manufacturer's instructions and ensure the storage bottle is sterile
- Refrigerate or freeze milk immediately after expressing
- Discard any breastmilk that has been thawed but not used
- Freeze milk that will not be used within two days. NHMRC draft Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers (2011) refer to a maximum refrigerated storage time of 96 hours.
- Date containers at the time of collection and use the oldest milk first.
- Parents are required to provide Expressed Breast Milk in clearly named and dated Infant feeding bottles.

In giving EBM, Educators/Staff will ensure:

- Refrigerated EBM will be warmed in its bottle in a jug of hot water or bottle warmer until the EBM reaches room temperature. After warming, gently shake the milk to mix it again. Several batches of EBM expressed at different times may be mixed and/or stored together to make enough EBM for one feed. EBM will not be re-warmed or re-served if the child does not consume the full contents on the first nursing.
- Do Not overheat or boil EBM as this can destroy valuable nutrients in breast milk. It is not recommended to use a microwave to thaw or heat EBM.
- Frozen EBM can be warmed quickly, but not in boiling water, or thawed slowly in the refrigerator, e.g. overnight. Frozen EBM will not be left to stand at room temperature. Frozen EBM will be thawed under cool running water, with warm water added until the EBM becomes liquid. It is then transferred to a disinfected feeding container, and stored in the refrigerator for no more than four hours, then warmed as for chilled.
- Breast milk will not be frozen or heated more than once. Small amounts of EBM will be offered to infants at a time. If the infant is not hungry educators/staff will not then have to throw out large quantities of EBM. If the baby needs more, another small amount will be prepared.

Management of Infant Formula

- Parents are required to provide Infant Formula in clearly named Infant feeding bottles.
- Infant formula bottles require the name of the infant formula to also be clearly written on the bottle.
- Infant formula will be stored in the coldest section at the back of the fridge
- Infant formula will be discarded after 24 hours if refrigerated
- Infant formula will be rewarmed by placing the container in heated, shallow water for no more than 15 minutes or through use of a commercial bottle warmer. Educators/staff will not use a microwave as it reheats unevenly.
- Infant formula that is removed from refrigeration should be used within 2 hours or discarded. Because of the possible bacterial contamination, formula remaining in a bottle 1 hour after the start of feeding should also be discarded
- Bottles are not to be reheated after a child has drunk part of the bottle; any unused formula is to be discarded. If any unused portion of formula is refrigerated and/or reheated germs from the babies mouth that has been introduced to the formula will have the opportunity to multiply
- Cooled boiled water is available to children under 12 months of age to drink at meal times and throughout the day.

Introducing Solids

- The average age for babies to commence solids is between the age of 4-6 months, however all babies are different and advice can be sought from Maternal and Child Health
- Introduction to solids should commence with a single food e.g.; infant rice cereal and should commence with a teaspoon once a day increasing the amount by a teaspoon each day until baby is eating 2 tablespoons

Where Food is provided by ECMS, Educators/Staff will:

- Provide children with a wide variety of healthy and nutritious foods for meals and snacks including fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereal products, dairy products, lean meats and alternatives.
- Plan and display the service menu (at least two weeks at a time) that is based on sound menu planning principles and meets the daily nutritional needs of children whilst in care.
- Plan healthy snacks on the menu to complement what is served at mealtimes and ensure the snacks are substantial enough to meet the energy and nutrient needs of children.
- Vary the meals and snacks on the menu to keep the children interested and to introduce children to a wide range of healthy foods.

When food is brought from home ECMS Educators/Staff will:

- Provide information to families on the types of foods and drinks recommended for children and suitable for children's lunchboxes.
- Encourage children to eat the more nutritious foods provided in their lunchbox, such as sandwiches, fruit, cheese and yoghurt, before eating any less nutritious food provided.
- Discourage the provision of highly processed snack foods high in fat, salt and sugar and low in essential nutrients in children's lunchboxes. Examples of these foods include lollies, chocolates, sweet biscuits, muesli bars, breakfast bars, fruit filled bars, chips, oven-baked crackers and flavoured corn chips.

All ECMS Staff/Educators will:

- Ensure water is readily available for children to drink throughout the day.
- Be aware of children with food allergies, food intolerances and special diets and consult with families to develop individual management plans.
- Ensure young children do not have access to foods that may cause choking.
- Ensure all children remain seated while eating and drinking.
- Always supervise children while eating and drinking.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for cooking staff and educators to undertake regular professional development to maintain and enhance their knowledge about early childhood nutrition.
- Ensure gloves are worn or food tongs are used by all staff handling 'ready to eat' foods.
- Children and staff wash and dry their hands (using soap, warm running water and single use or disposable towels) before handling food or eating meals and snacks.
- Food is stored and served at safe temperatures i.e. below 5°C or above 60°C.
- Children will be discouraged from handling other children's food and utensils.
- Food-handling staff attend relevant training courses and pass relevant information onto the rest of the staff.

- Sit with the children at meal and snack times to role model healthy food and drink choices and actively engage children in conversations about the food and drink provided.
- Endeavour to recognise, nurture and celebrate the dietary differences of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Create a relaxed atmosphere at mealtimes where children have enough time to eat and enjoy their food as well as enjoying the social interactions with educators and other children.
- Encourage older toddlers and pre-schoolers to assist to set and clear the table and serve their own food and drink - providing opportunities for them to develop independence and self-esteem.
- Encourage children to participate in a variety of 'hands-on' food preparation experiences.
- Provide opportunities and experiences for children in the educational program to engage in discovery, learning and discussion about healthy food and drink choices.
- Respect each child's appetite. If a child is not hungry or is satisfied, do not insist he/she eats.
- Be patient with messy or slow eaters.
- Encourage children to try different foods but do not force them to eat.
- Do not use food as a reward or withhold food from children for disciplinary purposes.

Special Diets/Allergies

- Menus provided in the service will as far as possible reflect the cultural composition of the families currently using the centre based services. The service will endeavour to be sensitive and responsive to special medical, religious, and cultural diets.
- It is the parents' responsibility to inform educators/staff of any foods their child is not able to eat for any reason by adding the relevant information to the child's enrolment form and advising educators/staff on any changes to this requirement.
- All services will support children with allergies. Any food restrictions due to allergies must have a diagnosis and certified letter by a Medical Practitioner.

Birthdays & Family Celebrations

- If families wish to celebrate a birthday or other family or cultural celebration they should discuss this with nominated supervisor/educators to determine the best way to do this. This will include taking into account allergies and other dietary or cultural requirements. Each service will have its own birthday celebration traditions/processes that they will inform families of.
- If food such as a birthday cake is provided families also need to provide a list of ingredients and they must not include lollies or sugary decorations or other ingredients or preservatives that staff advise are not permitted at that time.
- If candles are involved families are asked to provide a cupcake for blowing out candles to help minimise the spread of germs.
- It is recognised that not all families will want to celebrate birthdays and families are encouraged to discuss their family's special events and occasions for celebration so that they can contribute to the community life of ECMS and the children's curriculum.

Hot Drinks

- Hot drinks can only be prepared and consumed in areas inaccessible to children.

Policy Created
Date

March 2014, Reviewed September 2015, Reviewed July 2016

Policy Review Date	September 2018
Relevant Legislation	Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010(Vic) – Section 3 (2) (a); 167 Education and Care Services National Regulations: 77, .78, .90, .91, .168,
Relevant NQS	Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice Element 1.1.1 Quality Area 2: Children’s Health and Safety Element 2.1.1, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.3.2 Quality Area 3: Physical Environment Standard 3.1, Element 3.1.1 Quality Area 7: Leadership and Management Element 7.3.5, 7.2.2, 7.2.3
References	Healthy Achievement Program Food Standards Australia/NZ Better health Channel: Tucker talk tips (healthy, active Koorie kids) Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Support Documentation and Resources	National Health and Medical Research Council(2012) <i>Staying Healthy in Childcare Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services 5th edition</i> Accessed July 2016 http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/ch55 National Professional Support Coordinator Alliance (2012) Getting started with policies for the NQF: Policies in Practice template – Health hygiene and infection control. www.pscalliance.gov.au Department of Health Victoria <i>Blue book – Guidelines for the control of infectious diseases</i> Accessed July 2016 http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook.asp Department of Health Victoria <i>Victorian Prevention and Health Promotion Achievement Program</i> Accessed June 13 2013 http://www.health.vic.gov.au/prevention/achieve_early_childhood.htm