

# Hands-on Food Education and Taste Testing During COVID-19



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## Why is food education critical during this time?

Encouraging children to consume a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables every day provides vital nutrients for their growing minds and developing bodies. Like adults, eating fruits and vegetables can support the ability of children's bodies to fight infection and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) activities are a natural way to encourage children to develop a preference for healthy foods at a young age that will benefit them for the rest of their life.

## Can the coronavirus spread through food?

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of coronavirus. The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about six feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

## Can my classroom still engage in hands-on food education? If so, how?

Conducting hands-on, sensory, food activities can still happen with a few modifications that create a safer environment. The following recommendations for hands-on food education were consolidated from the FDA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and nutrition professionals.

### Wash Hands!

Adults and children should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after preparing or eating food.

Lead hand washing practice with students the day before the activity and repeat often.

Encourage children to keep their hands clean after washing by clasping hands together to "catch a ladybug!"



*(Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning requires licensed CCLCs and FCCLHs use liquid soap.)*

### Setting up the Classroom

- ✔ **Set up tables and chairs** to face one direction with six feet of space between them.
- ✔ Clean and sanitize areas where food will be prepared.
- ✔ Food preparation should be done at a six-foot distance from children.
- ✔ **Adults handling food should wear gloves and masks.** Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.
- ✔ **Wash and Prepare Food:** Adults should rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Scrub firm produce with a clean produce brush. For canned goods, remember to clean lids before opening.

To limit the number of people handling and serving food, use single-use options, or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers, and condiments.



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# Taste Testing Activity

**Keep children engaged during preparations.** Consider splitting children into two groups: tasting and activity. Engage children in drawing or writing prompt activities. For example, children can write or draw about a time they saw or ate the featured produce, who they might want to share the dish with, or the recipe that they are creating.

**Children should only prepare food that they will eat, not food for others.**



**Identify one person to serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.**



**Keep it simple:** Instead of multiple-ingredient recipes, consider simply focusing on one item cut in different ways or introducing new varieties of produce. For example, cut a carrot with a wavy knife or into sticks. Offer different varieties or colors of apples, radish, or tomatoes.

**Set the Table:** Adults should use clean, gloved hands to pass out plates, napkins, and utensils. While this is typically a great activity for children, it is not currently recommended.



**Serve on separate plates for each child.** Only adults using clean, gloved hands should do this task. Family-style dining is not recommended. Ensure multiple children do not use the same serving utensils or dip into common bowls.



**Model Taste Testing:** Show children how trying new food is fun, and model safety practices. Provide encouraging messaging for trying new foods and taste the food at the same time. If possible, sit at the table with children during the activity.



**Students should not share food.**



## Clean and Wrap up

- ✔ Participants should wash their hands.
- ✔ Disinfect areas where food was eaten and prepared.
- ✔ Adults should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.

To minimize respiratory droplet exposure, encourage children to share their opinion by using one thumb up if they tried it, two thumbs up if they liked it!

