GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Ministry of Education
Education Health Services Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the National Schools Dietary Services Limited

Strengthened Nutrition Guidelines for Foods and Beverages in Schools

Extract of the nutrition standards and the phased implementation schedule

> **About this extract.** This document compiles, for ease of reference, the operative provisions of Circular Memorandum No. 17 of 2025 (Strengthened Nutrition Guidelines for Foods and Beverages in Schools, 31 December 2025) and Circular Memorandum No. 34 of 2026 (Phased Implementation of the Strengthened Nutrition Guidelines for Foods and Beverages in Schools, 18 June 2026), both issued by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education. Part 1 reproduces the standards as issued. Part 2 sets out the phased schedule for the 2026/2027 academic year. Where this extract and a circular differ, the circular applies.

Scope

The circulars are addressed to the Principals of Government and Government-Assisted Primary and Secondary Schools, under flying seal to Schools Supervisors III, II and I. Principals are asked to share them with all concessionaires, tuck shop operators, vendors and Parent-Teacher Associations. The guidelines apply to all food and drink sold or distributed at school or on the school compound, subject to the exemptions in section D. Private schools are encouraged to adopt them.

Purpose

Since 2017, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has taken steps to improve the food and drink available in schools by prohibiting sugar-sweetened beverages. National survey data has since confirmed the effectiveness of this measure, with daily sugary drink consumption among school students falling significantly following the prohibition. Strong evidence shows that too much sugar, salt, unhealthy fats and caffeine in children's diets increases their risk of obesity, high blood pressure and other long-term health problems.

Building on the progress already made, the Ministries have introduced stronger nutrition guidelines to ensure that healthier food and drink options are available in schools. The guidelines are designed to create supportive environments that make the healthy choice the easy choice for students, teachers and families, in collaboration with parents, the community and other stakeholders. They are aligned with the guidance of the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Part 1. The Guidelines

Source: Circular Memorandum No. 17 of 2025, sections A to H, reproduced as issued.

A. Unapproved foods and beverages

Cafeteria concessionaires, vendors and staff must not sell or serve the following on all school premises:

- Sweetened beverages, including:

  - Soft drinks
  - Flavoured waters with added sugars
  - Juice drinks with added sugars
  - Energy/sports drinks
  - Tea with added sugar
  - Caffeinated beverages
- Pre-packaged snacks outside of the following nutritional guidelines:
  - More than 200 kcal per item
  - More than 13 g of total sugars
  - More than 30% of calories from fat
  - More than 200 mg sodium
- Foods without a Nutrition Facts label in English
- Fruits preserved in sugar or salt
- Products with sugar substitutes (e.g., stevia, sucralose, allulose, aspartame, acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) etc.)

B. Approved foods and beverages

Only the following beverages are permitted for sale or serving:

- Plain water
- Unsweetened coconut water:
  - 200 ml for ECCE/Primary Schools
  - 250 ml for Secondary Schools
- 100% fruit juices:
  - 200 ml (ECCE/Primary)
  - 250 ml (Secondary)
- Milk or plant-based milk substitute beverages with:
  - less than 16 g total sugar per 250 ml, or 13 g per 200 ml
- Milk products with:
  - less than 13 g total sugar

C. Healthier snack and meal guidelines

- All pre-packaged snacks must be:
  - Sold in single-serve portions only
  - Labelled with Nutrition Facts if pre-packaged
- In-house prepared or resale of unpackaged snacks (e.g., chows, muffins, pastries etc.) must:
  - Adhere to the same nutritional guidelines as pre-packaged snacks
  - Show evidence of following the nutritional guidelines (e.g., via nutrition label from bakery or recipe)
- **Multi-packaged items.** Individually wrapped small snacks (e.g., mints, fruit gummies) where the outer holding package contains Nutrition Facts but the individual units do not, may be sold provided that:
  - The outer package with the Nutrition Facts label is kept on display at the point of sale; and

  - The nutrition information is clearly visible and accessible to students and staff; and
  - The product is compliant with the nutritional guidelines
- As it relates to meals that are cooked on site or brought in for sale (e.g., breakfast, lunch, daily specials):
  - Meals should include a balance of fruits/vegetables, a starchy food, and lean protein
  - Use fresh or dried herbs and spices including salt-free all-purpose seasonings
  - Preferred cooking methods should include baking, grilling, roasting, steaming and/or boiling

> **Note:** A serving occasion refers to a service opportunity, i.e., breakfast, break time, lunchtime. For example, if a school provides breakfast, break and lunch service, then over the school week this provides a total of 15 serving occasions/service opportunities.

  - Iron-rich foods are encouraged and should be consumed with vitamin C items to maximise absorption in the body. These iron-rich foods should be served on at least 5 serving occasions.
  - Legumes (peas and beans) should be promoted and included as an option on the regular menu, for a minimum of four serving occasions per week.
  - Deep-fried foods and/or other high-fat products offered by cafeterias may only be served a maximum of six serving occasions per week.
    - Example: French fries, fried potatoes, fried chicken, fried fish, fried pies, pastries and other items made with pastry dough, fried bakes, paratha roti, deli/luncheon meats, ham, hot dogs, sausages, pizza.
  - Burgers and nuggets can be allowed as a daily lunch option if the patties/nuggets are freshly prepared using 90–95% lean minced beef, or 90–95% lean chicken meat (breast/thigh with no skin), or 90–95% fresh fish.
    - Note: The nutritional content of pre-packaged burger patties and nugget products must meet the criteria for appropriate content of fat, sodium and sugar as set out in these guidelines.
  - Vegetarian menu options should be made available at all serving occasions throughout the entire school week.
- Encouraged food items include:
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Unsweetened or unsalted fruit chows
  - Roasted or unsalted seeds, nuts and chick peas (channa)
  - Air-popped popcorn with no additives
  - Whole grain sandwiches with protein-rich fillings
  - Yogurt with less than 13 g total sugar per portion
- **Products strongly discouraged.** Any pre-packaged food items with nutritional content not in accordance with the nutritional guidelines. Examples may include:
  - Fruits preserved with excess salt and/or sugar such as 'red' mango, plum, pommecythere, cherry, series, tamarind, apricot; salted prune, jams, jellies, etc.
  - Sugar cake, toolum, tamarind ball, khurma, barfi, ladoo, jalebi
  - Iced/cream-filled cakes, chocolate-covered/sugar-coated cookies/biscuits
  - Brownies, Danish pastry, doughnuts, iced cookies, sugar cookies
  - Hard candy, liquid candy syrup, marshmallows, wafers, mints, fudge, toffee
  - Chewing gum, gummy bears, slushies (syrup based) (can be 100% fruit and/or vegetable options which are healthier), jub jub, chocolate candy bars
  - Caramel popcorn/candied popcorn, microwave popcorn

  - Heavily salted nuts and channa, candied/honey-roasted nuts, chocolate-coated nuts
  - Fried potato crisps/chips, cheese sticks, corn curls/balls
  - Ice cream, ice cream lollies/bars, and frozen treats high in sugars

D. Special events and fundraisers

All foods and drinks sold or distributed at school or on the school compound should follow these guidelines. Exemptions at the discretion of the Principal may be allowed for:

- Cultural celebrations (e.g., Carnival, Eid, Divali, Easter, Christmas, etc.)
- Curriculum-based cooking or Home Economics activities
- Sports day, school bazaars or special fundraisers (up to 3 times per term)
- Any meals and snacks brought from home for personal consumption

E. Marketing and promotion

The following promotional activities for unhealthy foods and beverages are strictly prohibited:

- Posters, signs, mascots, or giveaways promoting non-compliant products
- Sponsorship of school events, uniforms, teams, or materials by brands directly advertising non-compliant products
- Branded merchandise or digital content targeting students

Only healthy food and beverage items may be promoted within the school environment.

F. Monitoring and compliance

Principals, School Supervisors and Denominational Boards/School Managers (where applicable) are responsible for ensuring that these guidelines are upheld. Schools are required to:

- Conduct termly evaluations of cafeteria and vendor offerings using a checklist provided by the District Office
- Submit brief compliance reports to the School Nutrition Monitoring Team in each district
- Allow periodic spot checks by District Health and Education officers

A model checklist and assessment tool will be circulated to guide these reviews.

G. Education and support

Schools are encouraged to:

- Continue to incorporate nutrition education across the curriculum
- Establish or maintain school gardens to promote farm-to-table awareness where possible
- Host parent workshops and vendor training to support healthy food preparation

H. Partnership and innovation

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other key partners such as the National Schools Dietary Services Limited, will continue to work with food manufacturers, concessionaires, vendors and community stakeholders to encourage the development of healthier school-friendly products. This includes:

- Supporting manufacturers in innovating and reformulating snacks and beverages to meet the guidelines

- Providing vendor training and education on healthier food preparation
- Sharing sample recipes and product ideas that are culturally relevant and appealing to children
- Promoting collaboration with local farmers and suppliers to increase access to fresh, affordable options
- Encouraging farm-to-table initiatives in which schools partner with caterers and local farmers to supply fresh produce, while also fostering entrepreneurship among students

These efforts will ensure that, over time, schools will meet the criteria as outlined and also engage with practical, attractive alternatives that benefit students, staff and the wider community. The guidelines are situated within a broader vision for Health and Wellness in Schools that also emphasises physical activity, health promotion, screening and early identification, supportive environments for mental health and psychosocial well-being, and partnerships with District Health Teams, community organisations and other Ministries.

Part 2. Phased Implementation, 2026/2027

Source: Circular Memorandum No. 34 of 2026 and its Appendix. Circular Memorandum No. 17 of 2025 had anticipated full implementation from Term I of 2026/2027; Circular Memorandum No. 34 of 2026 subsequently set the phased schedule below.

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders, is now in the implementation phase of the guidelines. The strengthened guidelines are intended to support healthier school environments by improving the food and beverage options available to students, while allowing schools, cafeteria concessionaires, vendors, tuck shop operators, parents and other stakeholders sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments.

Implementation is being conducted in a phased manner across the 2026/2027 academic year. This phased approach is intended to ensure a practical and manageable transition, allowing for continued sensitisation, stakeholder engagement, product reformulation, menu adjustments and progressive compliance over time. The phases are:

- **Term I, September – December 2026:** Short-term implementation measures focusing on high-risk and clearly non-compliant items, including sugary drinks, energy drinks, non-compliant confectionery, unlabelled packaged items or items not labelled in English, and the marketing of non-compliant products in schools.
- **Term II, January – March 2027:** Medium-term implementation measures focusing on common school snacks and vendor items, including the phasing out of high-sugar traditional snacks, non-compliant iced or cream products, salted and sugar-preserved fruits, products with non-nutritive sweeteners, and a reduction in the frequency of fried items being sold.
- **End of Term III, July 2027:** Long-term implementation, including full compliance for packaged snacks, beverages, bakery items, meal components and labels, as well as the commencement of school-approved product registration.

Implementation schedule (Appendix to Circular Memorandum No. 34 of 2026)

Period	Focus	Main actions
Term I September – December 2026 (Short-term implementation measures)	High-risk, clearly non-compliant items	• Continue to remove sugary drinks and energy drinks • Confectionery that is non-compliant with the guidelines • All unlabelled packaged items, or items not in English • All marketing of non-compliant products in schools
Term II January – March 2027 (Medium-term implementation measures)	Common school snacks and vendor items	• Phase out high-sugar traditional snacks • Non-compliant iced/cream products • Salted and sugar-preserved fruits • Decrease frequency of fried items being sold • All products with non-nutritive sweeteners

Period	Focus	Main actions
End of Term III July 2027 (Long-term implementation)	Completion of manufacturer reformulation of products	• Require full compliance for ALL packaged snacks, beverages, bakery items, meal components and labels • School-approved product registration begins

Examples of products by category

Illustrative examples, including local items, prepared by the Education Health Services Unit to accompany the schedule.

Category	Examples, including local items	Removed from sale
Confectionery	Hard candy, lollipops, mints, liquid candy syrup, chewing gum, gummy bears, jub jub, marshmallows, fudge, toffee, chocolate candy bars, chocolate-covered sweets, wafers, sugar-coated biscuits/cookies	Term I
Unlabelled items	Any packaged item without a Nutrition Facts label, or with a label not in English	Term I
Salted preserved fruits / fruits preserved in sugar or salt	Red mango, salted mango, preserved plum, salted plum, salted prune, red pommecythere, preserved pommecythere, preserved cherry, preserved series, tamarind balls with salt/sugar, salted tamarind, apricot preserved in sugar/salt, fruit chows with excess salt or sweet sauces	Term II
High-sugar traditional snacks	Sugar cake, toolum, tamarind ball, barfi, ladoo, jalebi, kurma/khurma, sweet rice-based snacks, sweet coconut-based snacks, fudge, sweetened channa/nuts, candied or honey-roasted nuts	Term II
Ice/cream products and high-sugar frozen treats	Ice cream, ice cream cups, ice cream cones, ice cream bars/lollies, sweetened frozen lollies, syrup-based slushies, freezies, snow cone with syrup, frozen sweetened drinks, high-sugar yogurt pops, cream-filled frozen desserts	Term II
Products with non-nutritive sweeteners	Any food or drink sweetened with stevia, sucralose, allulose, aspartame, acesulfame potassium or similar	Term II
All other packaged snacks, beverages, bakery items and meal components	Must meet the nutritional guidelines and labelling requirements in full	By July 2027

Support during implementation

The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the National Schools Dietary Services Limited are providing sensitisation sessions for cafeteria concessionaires and vendors, practical guidance on what can be sold, district-based training for cafeteria operators covering nutrition and portions, meal planning

and food labels, and food safety, together with an operator handbook and a recipe booklet. Manufacturers and distributors will be advised of the arrangements for product submission, review and school-approved product registration.

Enquiries

Education Health Services Unit, Ministry of Education, Education Towers, No. 5 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain. Telephone 868-622-2181. Concessionaires and vendors may also raise questions through the Principal of the school.

Compiled by the Education Health Services Unit, Ministry of Education, September 2026, from Circular Memorandum No. 17 of 2025 (E: 19/12/37) and Circular Memorandum No. 34 of 2026 (E: 19/12/37 Vol. C).