

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Tower Gardens

Using Tower Gardens Safely

October 19, 2020

Version 1.0

Key Points

- There are close to 50 hydroponic tower gardens within schools and child care centres in the Southwestern Public Health region.
 - Students may interact with tower gardens provided infection prevention and control measures are followed.
 - Produce grown within a tower garden can be consumed when safe food handling is practiced.
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Guidance

This guidance reflects the current need for protection from COVID-19 in Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website www.swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information.

Overview

Children consuming an adequate number of fruits and vegetables has been identified as an ongoing challenge for decades. Research supports that children engaging in multi-component interventions that include nutrition education and hands-on activities like tower gardens are more impactful than other interventions. As a result, SWPH has actively provided schools and child care centres in the region with hydroponic tower gardens and training on their use.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many tower gardens in schools and child care centres have been shut down due to safety concerns. This guidance document outlines how tower gardens can be safely restarted and remain open during the pandemic.

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General Considerations

- Ensure appropriate infection prevention and control measures are applied when staff/students are tending to tower gardens. This includes:
 - Limiting access to the tower garden to one cohort (i.e. one classroom) at a time. To ensure this occurs, avoid leaving the tower garden in a communal space like a school's lobby.
 - Wash or sanitize your hands before and after handling and maintaining the tower garden.
 - Physical distance by remaining two (2) metres apart when demonstrations around the tower garden are occurring.
 - Wear a face covering as per the provincial regulation. It is important to teach students how to wear face coverings properly for the greatest protection and to remind children to avoid touching their face, mouth, or nose. Go to the COVID-19 School Support section at www.swpublichealth.ca for videos and resources on how to wear a face covering.
 - Practice respiratory etiquette (i.e. coughing or sneezing into the elbow).
 - Clean and disinfect shared tools and surfaces in and around the tower garden between uses.
- Sampling may occur as long as the following control measures are in place:
 - All staff and students must practice hand hygiene before and after handling produce.
 - All produce must be carefully washed under clean running water before preparing or eating. Do not use soap, detergent, or commercial produce wash on the food.
 - Do not serve/taste produce buffet style. Have one-person plate and distribute the produce for the group.