



Gauteng education department suspends food sales on school premises to protect pupils

The Gauteng department of education has issued a directive for the immediate suspension of food sales on school premises, in response to a surge in foodborne illnesses affecting pupils across the province.

The decision, announced on Friday, comes amid rising concerns over food safety, with reports indicating both illness and tragic loss of life among pupils due to unsafe food.

The Gauteng department of education stated that all schools must halt food sales, both within and around their premises, until further notice.

This action aims to safeguard the health and well-being of pupils while the department takes steps to ensure tighter regulations and oversight of food vendors.

Since February 2024, Gauteng has reported over 200 cases of food poisoning affecting children. Tragically, 10 children have died as a result, with 6 children dying in Soweto last month. The majority of these cases have been concentrated in the Ekurhuleni district.

Schools, along with School Governing Bodies (SGBs), have been instructed to closely monitor and regulate any individual or business involved in selling food to pupils.

Key measures include:

- Ensuring that only nutritious food items are sold.
- Prohibiting the sale of expired or repackaged food.
- Requiring compliance with Regulation 638, a law that governs food safety standards across the province.

To reinforce these guidelines, the department has reminded schools and SGBs of previous instructions mandating that all food vendors obtain a Certificate of Acceptability from their local health department's environmental health division.

Additionally, food stalls and premises must undergo inspection and receive approval before operating.

SGBs are tasked with verifying that food items are properly barcoded and sourced from reputable suppliers.

The department has urged schools to enforce these guidelines rigorously, with any violations reported promptly to both the district office and the department of health.

Gauteng Education MEC Matome Chiloane advised schools to communicate with parents, encouraging them to provide home-prepared meals rather than lunch money for the time being.

Chiloane also suggested that schools engage community organisations, education stakeholders and small business associations to foster a coordinated effort in preventing further foodborne illness incidents among pupils.

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MEDIA STATEMENT

To: All Media
Att: News Editors
For immediate release

8 November 2024

IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION OF FOOD SALES ON SCHOOL PREMISES TO PROTECT LEARNERS

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has instructed all schools to suspend the sale of food within and around school premises until further notice. This decision is informed by the recent and alarming increase in incidents of foodborne illnesses affecting learners across various schools in the province.

The Department is deeply concerned by how these incidents have led to both loss of life and illness among learners.

In response, we are implementing immediate measures to safeguard the health and well-being of our learners. Schools and SGBs are instructed to closely monitor and regulate vendors, tuckshops, and other outlets that sell food to learners.

Specifically, schools must ensure:

1. Only food of nutritional value is sold within or near school premises.
2. No expired or repackaged food items are sold to learners.
3. Any individual or business selling food to learners complies with Regulation 638 of 22 June 2018, which governs the safety and acceptability of food.
4. Schools, SGBs and vendors and traders must familiarise themselves with the provision above

Schools and SGBs are further reminded of prior guidelines issued by the GDE to regulate food sales to learners:

- All food vendors and traders must obtain a Certificate of Acceptability by contacting their local Health Department's Environmental Health Division before selling any food to learners.
- Food premises or stalls must be inspected and approved before operating.
- SGBs are responsible for ensuring vendors' compliance with these regulations, which include verification that all food items are properly barcoded and sourced from reputable suppliers.

The Department calls on schools to enforce these guidelines rigorously. Instances of non-compliance must be reported immediately to both the District Office and the Department of Health.

"To further protect learners, schools and SGBs are advised to issue a circular to parents, encouraging them to prepare meals at home instead of providing lunch money, until the relevant authorities issue updated guidelines for food vendors. Additionally, schools are encouraged to engage community organisations, education stakeholders, and small business associations to foster collaborative efforts aimed at preventing further incidents of foodborne illness," said Gauteng Education MEC, Mr Matome Chiloane.

For more information, contact the Gauteng Department of Education's Spokesperson, Steve Mabona on 072 574 3860 or Spokesperson for Gauteng Education MEC Matome Chiloane, Xolani Mkhwemte on 084 513 9285

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