03.2 Food for play and cooking activities

Some parents/carers and staff may have strong views about food being used for play. It is important to be sensitive to these issues. For example, children who are Muslim, Jewish, Rastafarian, or vegetarian, should not be given any food to play with that contains animal products (Gelatine). Parents/carers' views should be sought on this. In some cases, it is not appropriate to use food for play, particularly in times of austerity.

- Food for play may include dough, corn flour, pasta, rice, food colourings/flavourings.
- Jelly (including jelly cubes) is not used for play.
- Food for play is risk assessed against the 14 allergens referred and is included in the written risk assessment undertaken for children with specific allergies.
- Staff are constantly alert to the potential hazards of food play, in particular choking hazards and signs of previously undetected allergies.
- Pulses are not recommended as they can be poisonous when raw or may choke.
- The use of raw vegetables for printing is discouraged.
- Dried food that is used for play should be kept away from food used for cooking.
- Foods that are cooked and used for play, such as dough, have a limited shelf life.
- Cornflour is always mixed with water before given for play.
- Cornflower and cooked pasta are discarded after an activity; high risk of bacteria forming.
- Utensils used for play food are washed thoroughly after use.

Children's cooking activities

- Before undertaking any cooking activity with children, members of staff should check for allergies and intolerances by checking children's records.
- Children are taught basic hygiene skills such as the need to wash hands thoroughly before handling food, and again after going to the toilet, blowing their nose or coughing.
- The area to be used for cooking is cleaned; a plastic tablecloth is advised.
- Children should wear aprons that are used just for cooking.
- Utensils provided are for children to use only when cooking, including chopping/rolling boards, bowls, wooden spoons, jugs, and are stored in the kitchen.
- Members of staff encourage children to handle food in a hygienic manner.
- Food ready for cooking or cooling is not left uncovered.
- Cooked food to go home is put in a paper food bag and refrigerated until home time.

- Food play activities are suspended during outbreaks of illness.

Playdough and raw (uncooked flour)

All flour including cornflour is raw until the point it is heated or cooked. Raw flour poses a risk of E. coli to young children and current advice is that it should not be used for play, or for uncooked playdough recipes.

- Only playdough that has been cooked or made with precooked flour should be used.
- Only cornflour that has been cooked or made with precooked flour should be used.

If a child or member of staff is allergic to any of the ingredients they must be replaced, and a safe alternative used.

Staff have up to date information about children's allergies or concerns about a potential allergy and these are clearly displayed.

If a younger child is likely to put the playdough/cornflour in their mouth, a safe alternative is provided.

If a child is likely to eat the playdough due to persistent sensory seeking behaviours the activity will be replaced with a safe alternative.

Children are always supervised when playing with playdough or cornflour.

Children and staff wash their hands before and after the activity.

Other activities with flour

Uncooked flour should not be used for activities where children are exploring through touch or taste, or there is a likelihood they will put their fingers in their mouths.

Baking: You can do baking activities where flour is used and then the food is cooked. You must ensure that the activity is risk assessed, and children do not eat the uncooked flour or the mixture.