Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery and adaptability of school food programs in Canada

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Background
The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences on food security and the nutritional quality of the diet of Canadians as many have been faced with reduced work hours and unemployment. Lower income and vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected, further exacerbating existing disparities in access to healthful food.

Food insecurity among school children who are dependent on school meals for their nutritional needs has doubled as a result of fractured school operating schedules or long-term school closures impacting access to voluntary school food programs (SFP).

Objective
To conduct a systematic rapid review on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery, resiliency, and adaptability of school food programs across Canada.

Methods
Given the rapid pace of knowledge dissemination related to COVID-19, we aimed to examine information published in the popular press.

Using relevant keywords, articles were systematically searched through a newspaper database (Newsstream), complemented by a social media search with an online database Social Search. Articles were analyzed using the ANGELO (Analysis Grid for Environments Linked to Obesity Framework) and GTE (Getting to Equity Framework) to capture environmental aspects impacting SFP and to identify gaps in policies that would enable schools to feed children in emergency settings.

We conducted a content analysis to synthesize the common themes from both the ANGELO and GTE frameworks that emerged across the included articles.

Results
The results of the study can be used in the future to create more sustainable and adaptable school food programs during the pandemic was leveraging existing community partnerships and distribution channels.

Figure 1. ANGELO Framework to capture adaptation of environmental aspects of school food programs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 2. GTE Framework to capture adaptability of school food programs for food insecure or marginalized communities

Conclusions
We identified the challenges and adaptations of school food programs across Canada, particularly the factors that played a role in the resiliency and continued delivery of school food programs.

The results of the study can be used in the future to create more sustainable and adaptable school food programs, especially during emergency feeding or particularly during school closures (e.g., summer time).

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References
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