



Vegan Fridays Come to NYC Public Schools

By Karen Asp, MA, CPT, VLCE
February 08 2022

The more than 1 million students in New York City Public Schools have a new reason to look forward to Fridays. On Feb. 4, the country's largest school system rolled out Vegan Fridays—a groundbreaking initiative to offer fully vegan lunch menus at all public schools throughout New York City every Friday.

The move comes after Eric Adams, former Brooklyn borough president and author of *Healthy at Last*, was sworn in as New York City mayor last month. Adams has been a vocal proponent of the health benefits of plant-based diets since 2016, when he [reversed his type 2 diabetes](#) after eliminating meat and dairy from his diet. “Plant-based options in schools means healthy eating and healthy living, and improving the quality of life for thousands of New York City students,” Adams said in a statement. “I’m thrilled to see that all students will now have access to healthy foods that will prevent debilitating health conditions.”

The launch builds on the school system's success with [Meatless Mondays](#), which it introduced in 2019, and Meatless Fridays, which rolled out in April 2021. Vegan options like hummus and pretzels or PB&J have been available daily at NYC public schools since 2017.

The Vegan Fridays initiative, however, takes the plant-based message a step further, as the entire menu features vegan food and stars a hot vegan entree. (Non-vegan options are available by request, including cow's milk, which federal law requires public schools to offer at each meal.) Items offered last week on the first Vegan Friday, included veggie tacos and salsa, seasoned broccoli, and a carrot salad.

Lifestyle medicine experts have welcomed the news. “Giving students more immune-boosting fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans is now more important—and will also help set them up for a lifetime of good health,” says [Neal Barnard, MD, FACC](#), president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

Studies support the effectiveness of introducing kids to [healthy habits](#) early. “The earlier in life that we can establish healthful eating habits, the better,” says Eugenia Gianos, MD, director of Cardiovascular Prevention for Northwell Health and director of Women's Heart Health at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. “I see our young people struggle with [excess weight], obesity, and even diabetes at younger and younger ages. Research shows that plant-based diets help people achieve a healthy weight, so I applaud this positive step.”

The New York City DOE posts menus several weeks ahead of time so parents and students can see what the schools are offering. Visit the [NYCDOE website](#) for more information.

To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support, check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.