

Enhancing Nutrition and Food Safety at Cambodian Temples Through Culturally Preferred Foods

ST. PAUL, MN, UNITED STATES, April 16, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- What we eat is deeply tied to who we are—our identity, community, and lived experiences. “Culturally preferred foods” refer to safe and nutritious options that reflect the tastes, values, and traditions of diverse cultural groups. These foods aren't just about flavor; they represent a sense of belonging. For example, individuals who identify with Muslim or Jewish traditions may seek halal or kosher foods, just as many Asian communities may lean toward familiar staples like rice, fermented vegetables, or lactose-free options.



Observing Traditional Meal Practices at a Cambodian Temple

Recognizing the importance of cultural identity in nutrition, offering affordable and culturally preferred food options not only makes healthy eating more accessible—it also respects and celebrates the traditions that shape people's daily lives. As defined by the CDC's Food Service Guidelines Toolkit, “Culturally preferred foods” describes safe and nutritious foods that meet diverse tastes and needs of customers based on their cultural identity.” When aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, these foods can help improve diet quality and overall health outcomes. At the same time, they offer a meaningful opportunity for others to explore and appreciate cuisines outside their own.

Putting Cultural Nutrition into Practice: A Cambodian Temple Case Study

Building on our previously announced collaboration, Asian Media Access (AMA) and Rochester Clinic are excited to share new updates in our ongoing efforts to support Cambodian families through culturally tailored food service guidelines. After assessing food preparation practices and community preferences at Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram, a Cambodian temple in Rochester, MN, the team has developed updated policy recommendations that strengthen food safety,

promote nutritional balance, and reflect deep cultural understanding. These next steps—shaped through strong community partnerships—demonstrate how public health goals can be advanced in ways that honor tradition. This continued work sets a powerful example of how culturally informed approaches can empower families to enjoy healthy, meaningful meals rooted in heritage.

Policy Recommendations for Improving Food Safety

The updated recommendations include hygiene protocols such as proper handwashing, glove use, and the separation of utensils for raw and cooked foods; maintaining safe food temperatures; establishing regular cleaning routines; and improving waste management through designated bins. Food safety posters in Khmer are also displayed in kitchen areas to support community education.

Beyond food safety, the initiative encourages healthier meals by adapting the Harvard Healthy Eating Plate model to fit traditional Cambodian cuisine. This includes emphasizing vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins, while reducing processed foods. Recognizing the high rate of lactose intolerance in the Asian community, the team also recommends replacing dairy with water or plant-based alternatives. These culturally respectful practices provide families with clear, actionable steps for preparing safe and nourishing meals.

Looking Ahead: A Season for Action

As the weather warms up and more community gatherings are on the horizon, now is the perfect time to take action. AMA and Rochester Clinic will continue working closely with temple leadership to support the next phase of improvements. Their work serves as a powerful example



for others seeking to align public health nutrition with cultural traditions in meaningful and sustainable ways.

We encourage other communities, food vendors, public health agencies, and cultural initiatives to follow this lead. By conducting cultural assessments, collaborating with local partners, and incorporating culturally preferred foods into food service guidelines, we can not only improve health outcomes—but also celebrate diversity, strengthen community bonds, and promote inclusivity. Organizations are also encouraged to explore the CDC's Food Service Guidelines Toolkit, which offers practical guidance on how to engage vendors, identify cross-cultural ingredients, and start conversations around adding culturally preferred foods to menus. These resources help answer key questions such as: How do I get support for culturally preferred foods? How can vendors include customer preferences? And how do I help vendors source authentic cultural ingredients? Together, we can build a community that uplifts health through culture-informed nutrition. For resources, updates, and more information about this initiative, visit: <https://ballequity.amamedia.org/project-support> and <https://www.cdc.gov/food-service-guidelines-toolkit/php/strategize-act/cultural-food-preferences.html>

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