**Guidance for Bulk Meals**

Maine now allows preparing meals in bulk - multiple meals for several days in one package – as part of the **FNS Programs** during a time of unanticipated closures. Bulk meals would be offered for children up to the age of 18 only. The School Food Authority (SFA) must request approval from the Maine Child Nutrition State Agency (SA) and have a plan for how the quantity of food provided was calculated. When requesting approval from the SA, please indicate the site name and the number of days’ worth of meals provided per box. The maximum number of days you may request to distribute meals for is 5 days if operating under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and 7 days is operating under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Advanced planning of bulk meals is required to ensure that the meal pattern is met, and food will be stored and prepared in a safe manner by recipients. Those who receive bulk meals will need to know the planned menu, proper storage of products to ensure food safety and preparation steps. Providing meals in bulk may help reduce the amount of staff hours and exposure to others.

**Considerations**

* Menu:
	+ Consider ease of food preparation and good food safety practices both in transport and for the recipient
	+ Plan meals with a shorter shelf life at the beginning of the week
	+ If using bulk cereal, make sure to use a scale to ensure the correct total amount is provided
	+ Whether you’re operating under the Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, or the National School Lunch Program, make sure the meal pattern is being followed
		- Under SFSP, there is no vegetable subgroups requirement
		- Under NSLP, you may only provide meals on planned school days, Monday-Friday
* Packaging of Bulk Meals for Recipients:
	+ Include a copy of the planned menu so households know what items go together
	+ Include clear food storage instruction so that families understand the importance of food safety.
	+ How will bulk meals be packaged? One bulk package with meals for one child? Or one bulk package with meals for more than one child? Perhaps the SFA prepares bulk packages with meals for one child and bulk packages for meals for two children. Then at distribution, packages can be combined for households with three (a 1 and 2 box) or four (two-2 box package) children.
	+ Package food in single use containers
	+ Package all items that require refrigeration together to help maintain proper temperature
	+ Consider including items that are delivered to you frozen, such as fruit cups or juice, to use as an “ice pack” to help keep cold products cold during transport.
	+ If your menu has sandwiches, wraps or other similar items, do not build them. Instead, pack the ingredients separately to maintain the quality of the meal
* Food Safety:
	+ Always use proper food safety practices, including good hand hygiene
	+ Transport carriers – clean and sanitize before every use. To help maintain proper temperatures, chill coolers in freezer or heat using hot water prior to loading food
* Other:
	+ Food Service Staff - practice social distancing during food preparation and distribution
	+ Notify the suppliers you work with of your intent to serve bulk meals and potential changes in products you typically order

**How to start**

1. Contact Maine Child Nutrition for approval at Child.nutrition@maine.gov
	1. Include:
		1. the site(s) your requesting to do bulk meals
		2. Date you will be starting
		3. the program you are operating under (SFSP/NSLP/CACFP)
		4. the number of days you will be sending meals for
2. Develop a plan using the ‘Considerations’ listed above
	1. Plan a menu for the number of days meals will be provided for
	2. Determine where and how meals will be distributed
	3. Determine how you will communicate with recipients
	4. Train your staff
3. Announce the new procedure
4. Obtain any local approval as needed
5. Maintain documentation

**Distribution**

* Maintain six-feet distance at all times. We know you miss your students, but no hugging!
* Ensure meals are stored and distributed at proper temperature
* No hand to hand contact
* Have hand sanitizer/wipes available during distribution and train staff to use after each delivery
* If using single-use gloves, change after each distribution
* If a using a school bus for mobile delivery, use flashers NOT red lights

**Reporting**

* Meals are for children up to age 18 only.
* Proper accountability must be followed.
* One meal type per day per child.

**Employee well being**

* Employees must stay home if they are not feeling well or have any signs of illness Follow COVID-19 guidance from the CDC

Please contact Maine DOE Child Nutrition fat child.nutrition@maine.gov for more information or to submit a request for an approval.