

Managing School Nutrition Programs During COVID-19 Pandemic

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: How can I offer meals to my students during the COVID-19 unanticipated school closure?

A: USDA has made a few options available to continue feeding students reimbursable meals during unanticipated school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. For schools/ location(s) that qualify for the area eligible, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), meals may be served to any children 18 and under for free.
2. For schools/ locations that are in non-area eligible locations, the SFSP may serve meals to children who are eligible for free/reduced meals.
3. For locations that do not qualify under SFSP, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is available to serve reimbursable meals to children and meals are claimed based on the individual eligibility of each child.

SFSP and NSLP can be offered in a non-congregate setting for social distancing purposes. Both have options for mobile meal routes and delivery directly to student home upon request. The Maine [Child Nutrition Department of Education](#) website has many resources that cover all options. Please use this as a resource as there are differences between the programs, including reimbursement rates.

Supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage include:

- SFSP versus SBP/NSLP (comparison chart)
- Mobile Routes in Area Eligible Locations guidance
- Household delivery in Non-eligible Locations guidance
- SFSP resources (meal pattern, meal counting form, application guide)
- USDA waiver requests
- Webinars and supporting PowerPoint slides
- Additional guidance

Q: Can drivers deliver meals off-site?

A: Yes, individual mobile routes (via bus, van or other method) can be considered a site serving reimbursable meals with Child Nutrition approval. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: My superintendent wants to know if we could deliver meals to students who are verified as F/R who have been quarantined?

A: Yes, but there are restrictions with this, including privacy concerns. It can be done using SFSP if under an approved site or with NSLP if that is the option the district is choosing. Please reference supporting documents on the Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: Can our drivers drive their regular routes and stop at their regular stops to drop off food to families regardless of if they are eligible for free and reduced meals? We feel that if we are operating as if school were in session that food remains an important part of the day.

A: Meals may only be distributed at eligible/approved sites, including bus routes, in order to be claimed for reimbursement under the SFSP. If meals are claimed for reimbursement, they must be for children/students. If NSLP is being used, this is also allowable but there needs to be a roster or other means to track reimbursable

meals by student name so they can be properly claimed. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: We serve a wide geographical area. If feasible, could we prepackage our meals straight from the kitchen, and deliver to our bus stops? Car Window pickups to promote social distancing?

Yes, you would only be able to be reimbursed for meals served from approved SFSP sites, which can include mobile routes, or if served using NSLP, when applicable. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: Can someone go pick up multiple meals from a site that qualifies and deliver to a non-qualifying school/area for students?

A: It is not allowable for staff/volunteers to pick up multiple reimbursable meals and deliver to a non-qualifying distribution site. However, there are options for delivery directly to students. Please reference supporting documents on the Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: Can I only serve reimbursable meals at school sites? Can I pass out reimbursable meals at the fire station, city hall and central office?

A: For the SFSP, sites where reimbursable meals are being distributed need to qualify. They don't have to be a school, as long as the fire station (for example) is in a qualifying area, it can be a feeding site. Each site must have its own site information sheet set up and approved in NEO.

Serving reimbursable meals from a non-school site is also allowable under the NSLP, but meal counting must be done differently as meals are claimed differently. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q. How does mobile delivery work?

A: A vehicle can be used following a route, such as a typical bus route, and reimbursable meals can be distributed. Under SFSP, this works when the school is greater than 50% free/reduced or qualifies via area eligibility.

When the school is under 50% free/reduced eligibility, under SFSP, meals can be delivered to a household if there is household consent. Household consent must be obtained in writing. Accountability is done by student name and eligibility. Only meals for households that qualify for free and reduced-price meal benefits can be claimed for reimbursement using this method. Student confidentiality must be upheld during the process.

Under NSLP, meals can also be delivered. A student checklist or other method of accountability that captures meals counts by free, reduced, and paid status must be used. As indicated above, student confidentiality must be upheld during the process.

Q: Does a food pantry count as a meal delivery site if it doesn't fall inside the FRAC region?

A: For SFSP: based on current guidance received, sites have to be eligible based on summer requirements 50% or greater. Is it 50% or greater free and reduced area?

If using NSLP, the pantry can be a meal delivery/distribution site.

Q: Food is prepared at one of our schools, which is also an eligible site. If the district was to close all schools, can the food still be prepared and picked up at the school?

A: SFSP: If the site is eligible, then yes but that is a decision that will need to be made by local district leaders. Food could be picked up at the school or any other open site for SFSP service.

Q: Do kids be present to pick up the meals- or could a parent drive up and say they have two kids at home without us actually seeing the parents?

A: USDA has provided a national waiver, that Maine has elected to use, which allows the parent/guardian to pick up meals for their children. The children do not have to be present to obtain a meal, but the school needs to be fairly confident they have children and the quantity they say they have.

Q: To have a better access point for families, could we change the service location to a school even if the school is not in an approved area, again by just a few thousand feet?

A: Currently, the meal service site has to be in an approved area to claim all children 18 and under using SFSP. However, USDA has provided additional flexibility, including the option to use NSLP. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: If we close school and run the Summer Program can any child come to the site for a meal?

A: Yes, if the site is in an eligible area. Just like the traditional SFSP, sites are open to children 18 and under.

Q: How can we partner with the local non-profit sponsors to provide meals to our district students in all communities we serve? Specifically, could we move their preparation site to one of our schools so that we could service more children if we served the meals from the approved site?

A: Yes, the school district can be the food preparer for meals served from an approved site. The school district has the option to take over as the sponsor as well. This can be changed once the unanticipated school closure ends. However, keep in mind, if meals are being delivered directly to homes, the SFA must be the sponsor.

Q: Can I add additional sites if I am an established SFSP sponsor?

A: Yes, if they qualify. School data, census block data or if the site was an open/area eligible site in 2018 or 2019, it qualifies. Child Nutrition can assist with verifying eligibility.

Q: We operate a summer feeding site out of our middle school, but a non-profit organization is the sponsor, and they claim the meals. How would that work with the unanticipated closures?

A: You are eligible to become a SFSP sponsor and take over existing SFSP sites. However, we encourage you to work with the non-profit sponsor to come up with a plan of action. They may already be in planning stages as well.

If you decide to join SFSP, we can work with you in the office on the application and site information sheets. Also, remember, if meals are being delivered directly to homes, the SFA must be the sponsor.

Q: If a school district becomes a summer food service sponsor, would all of their schools be able to be sites?

A: Under SFSP, site eligibility must be established for each site. School data, census block data or if the site was an open/area eligible site in 2018 or 2019, it qualifies. Child Nutrition can assist with verifying eligibility and looking at all options. If the site does not qualify, NSLP can be used.

Q: On the site information sheet, what should I enter for ‘maximum capacity’?

A: You should ensure that the maximum capacity in the site information sheet indicates estimated daily meals to be served. This may be higher than what is normally served in the summer due to the unanticipated school closure. You will not be able to claim more than what is entered here.

Q: If we are not 50% free and reduced and we don't have a summer feeding program, if school shuts down are we still supposed to feed the students or do we refer them to another site?

A: Offering a meal is the district's option. If schools do not qualify and neighborhood census does not work, the district can suggest other locations, but it is suggested to talk to the other district. Alternatively, you can consider NSLP or working with Child Nutrition staff to look at all options.

Q: If the district does close down its schools, can we use the summer feeding or CACFP programs to continue food service to students?

A: If schools did close because of a pandemic outbreak schools could operate the Summer Food Service Program if eligible. The summer regulations would apply with the only current exception it is during the school year. CACFP is allowed to operate as well. Please contact [CACFP staff](#) for guidance.

Q: Our district is a host site for Summer Meals. A partner organization operates the site. So, would they take over and offer meals at one of our open sites, like a park?

A: That is a decision that will need to be made locally either by the district or the partner. A partner kitchen may not be adequate for the potential number of meals. An agreement to share, or kitchen use may be needed for kitchen and staffing. Please keep in mind if meals are being delivered to student homes, the SFA needs to be the sponsor.

Q: Can we do a summer program now and NOT over the summer?

A: You can, this is a unique opportunity to provide meals to students that may not have access to meals otherwise.

Q: If a school district was to close due to the Coronavirus, and wanted to count days by sending home packets of school work, what would the food service department do about feeding the students. Don't they have to still provide a meal somehow in order to count it as a school day?

A: In this unique pandemic situation, it is not required to have a meal to call that day a school day. Meals could be offered using SFSP at eligible sites or NSLP.

Q: If we do not qualify for SFSP, can we choose to willingly provide a site or drop site? Is that allowed?

A: Yes, but the meals may not be eligible for reimbursement and could become a district expense not food service. USDA has provided more flexibility on claiming free and reduced meals under SFSP in non-qualifying areas via delivery models. They have also allowed NSLP to be used. Please reference supporting documents on the Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

March 27, 2020

Q: How can my district feed students if we do not qualify?

A: That is a local decision. NSLP can be used and there is additional flexibility to use SFSP in non-qualifying areas for children who qualify for free and reduced-price meal benefits. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage for additional guidance.

Q: Can breakfast and lunch meals for multiple days be given out and claimed or do children need to come back each day to receive their meals?

A: Yes, breakfast and lunch can be provided at the same time. Email Paula.Nadeau@maine.gov or Pamela.Partridge@maine.gov for permission of up to 3 days' worth of distribution at one time. Separate tick sheets should be used for accountability. So, if you are delivering 3 days of breakfast and lunch at once, that would mean 6 separate tick sheets, with each sheet labeled accordingly. For ease of paperwork, one tick sheet can be completed, photocopied and labeled accordingly. Sheets would need to be adjusted to accommodate any meals declined by families (for instance, accepting breakfast but not lunch) as the counts would not be the same for all meals.

Q: Do Districts have to send home meals with children if they do continuing education at home?

A: That is a local decision. The district has the option to provide meals under qualifying programs.

We do not have any qualifying sites other than one elementary for a summer site (which we do not currently do) Nor do we have a CACFP program. We want the children to eat!! However, not sure how to go about this.

A: Look for summer sites based on neighborhood/census data. Consider home delivery options or using NSLP. Please reference supporting documents on the Maine Child Nutrition webpage or contact our office for additional guidance.

Q: How do I add new sites that didn't operate in the past to my application?

A: This is done in the Summer module in NEO by adding a new site in the 'Site Listing' then creating a new site information sheet in the 'Application Listing'. Each site that qualifies where service is planned must have a separate site information sheet in NEO. Child Nutrition is reviewing the applications and approving accordingly.

Q: Looking at our current CACFP menu of bag lunches, can we offer grab n go meals?

A: Yes, non-congregate feeding is allowed under CACFP due to a nationwide waiver from USDA. Please contact [CACFP staff](#) for guidance as they are the experts.

Q: Summer Meals only allows for the students to receive one meal per meal period. I have noticed some districts distributing a breakfast and lunch at one time. Is there a waiver to allow us to serve more than one meal at a time?

A: Yes, breakfast and lunch can be provided at the same time. Email Paula.Nadeau@maine.gov or Pamela.Partridge@maine.gov for permission of up to 3 days' worth of distribution at one time. Separate tick sheets should be used for accountability. So, if you are delivering 3 days of breakfast and lunch at once, that would mean 6 separate tick sheets, with each sheet labeled accordingly. For ease of paperwork, one tick sheet can be completed, photocopied and labeled accordingly. Sheets would need to be adjusted to accommodate any

March 27, 2020

meals declined by families (for instance, accepting breakfast but not lunch) as the counts would not be the same for all meals.

Q: Can we offer meals through the Summer food service program if we are below 50% free/reduced eligibility?

A: Yes. For schools/ locations that are in non-area eligible locations, the SFSP may serve meals to children who are eligible for free/reduced meals. Please see guidance on the Child Nutrition website for more information.

For locations that do not qualify under SFSP, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is available to serve reimbursable meals to children and meals are claimed based on the individual eligibility of each child

Q: Should we use plastic or pre-wrapped utensils?

A: This is a local decision. Be very diligent in making sure that only the handles are touched when grabbing the utensils. Providing the utensils with the handles up will help. The utensils and storage container should be washed often. Again, we *strongly* encourage frequent proper handwashing for staff and students. Safe social distancing practices are also important.

Q: Will there be any guidance or meetings from the Maine DOE to help us work through this?

A: Maine DOE's Child Nutrition will help in any way we can to insure students are offered a meal when possible. Contact [Maine DOE's Child Nutrition Team](#).

Q: Can I use the CNP web for application for summer program?

A: No, CNPweb is currently only for CACFP.

Q: Do we need to change the current application for SFSP to reflect the "pandemic" identifier?

A: If you had already completed a 2020 SFSP application prior to the unanticipated closure for your planned SFSP operations that start in Summer, you should make sure it is accurate for services under the unanticipated school closure due to COVID-19. If it is accurate you are all set. When any changes are made, make sure they are approved locally and by the DOE.

Q: Do you think that the federal government will continue to change regulations as things seem to be continually changing?

A: As we get more information, we will distribute accordingly. We are in regular communication with the regional office and they are bringing the Northeast States' concerns to headquarters.

Q: Just wanted to confirm – is there a second form to apply for in regard to serving kids food if school is shut down? Or does our SFSP application work once that has been approved?

A: There is not a second form, the 2020 SFSP application will work but make sure the information is pertinent to service during unanticipated school closures. Refer to the handout on our webpage 'Steps to Become a Summer Sponsor'. This should be completed now to be approved for feeding during unanticipated school closures. It can be edited at a later time to reflect traditional SFSP service for the Summer.

Q: Will there be a webinar, Call in or additional info?

A: All resources can be found on our homepage: <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition>

Q. How can I find additional sites/areas of need?

A: The USDA Area Eligibility Map is a great resource. It can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility> Any area in pink is qualifying. Child Nutrition staff can also assist in determining pockets of need.

Q. Can I serve meals over April vacation?

A. The break must officially be cancelled by the district for you to claim reimbursement for meals served. Here is guidance from USDA:

If a scheduled spring break was postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19, may meals served while schools were closed be claimed under SFSP, provided the school had an approved unanticipated school closure waiver?

Yes, in the case of school closures due to COVID-19, FNS can allow SFSP sponsors to claim Federal reimbursement for meals served during scheduled spring breaks that were cancelled or postponed due to the unforeseen public health emergency.

Q. Can I provide milk in bulk to families? For instance, a gallon, rather than 8 ounce containers?

A. Yes, if the minimum amount of required servings are included in the container. A gallon of milk would have 16 8-oz servings.

Q. Does USDA have a long-term plan for how schools will continue providing meals?

A: Child Nutrition is in regular contact with USDA regarding changes. USDA continues to provide updated guidance and support. They are open to feedback from the states and use this to help push through flexibilities and waivers. Child Nutrition regularly brings forwards concerns heard from the field.

Q: Under NSLP, can siblings receive meals if they are not enrolled in the school?

A: Yes, they would be claimed as the same status as the district children in the household.