



FAQs on Child Nutrition Program Options Available During School Closures Related to the Coronavirus

Based on available guidance and options available as of 3/16/2020. Please defer to the US Department of Agriculture's guidance and your state agency.

1. What programs are available to serve kids during unanticipated school closures?
 - At this time, the **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** and the National School Lunch Program **Seamless Summer Option (SSO)** are available options.
 - SFSP and SSO allow for reimbursable meals – a breakfast and lunch or any one meal and one snack per child per day – to be served during unanticipated school closures.
 - Under other circumstances, such as snow days or teacher strikes, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-Risk Afterschool Meals component is an option for unanticipated closures.
 - Legally, this is still an option, but this is not currently recommended or being pursued as an option because additional waivers would be necessary to operate CACFP At-Risk Afterschool while allowing for social distancing, such as waiving the enrichment requirement.
 - The National School Lunch Program (including NSLP Afterschool Snacks) and School Breakfast Program do **NOT** allow for meal service during school closures.
2. What is social distancing?
 - Social distancing is a method of preventing the spread of a contagious disease by limiting the physical proximity and probability of contact between people.
 - Requiring groups of children to eat together defeats the purpose of school closures intended to stop the community spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.
3. Can meals be served outside of group (“congregate”) settings to allow for social distancing?
 - According to the USDA's [COVID-19 response page](#), all states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have submitted waiver requests and received approval to authorize non-congregate meal service through the SFSP and SSO.
 - Please contact your state agency to verify the exact contents of the waiver, including:
 - Whether the waiver is statewide,
 - The duration of the waiver (most appear to be through June 30, 2020 or the end of the public health emergency, whichever is sooner), and
 - Whether schools to operate as sites through SFSP or SSO during unanticipated closures. Due to the USDA summer meals memoranda recessions, states must now request this waiver.

4. Can states submit waivers for other requirements?
 - Yes, states may submit requests for waivers from other requirements as necessary and appropriate. These may include requests for waivers from meal pattern requirements, time restrictions for meals service, or certain administrative and record keeping requirements.
 - To submit a waiver, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/child-nutrition-program-waiver-request-guidance-and-protocol-revised>.
5. Should states wait for legislation to allow the USDA to make blanket national waivers?
 - We understand that submitting waiver requests takes additional work and requires additional reporting. However, we encourage all states to be proactive and submit any necessary waiver requests as soon as possible due to the unclear timeline for passage and implementation of legislation that might give the USDA this authority.
 - We continue to advocate for Congress to give the USDA broad waiver authority.
6. Can schools or sponsoring organizations take action on their own?
 - No, schools and sponsors **cannot** submit a waiver request directly to the USDA, nor should they implement non-congregate meal service through the SFSP or SSO or other flexibilities without their state agency submitting a waiver on their behalf.
 - However, schools, school food authorities, and sponsoring organizations should begin working in coordination on plans for responding to school closures and proactively communicating with their state agency regarding waiver status and procedures.
7. Will schools or sponsoring organizations eventually have to submit waiver requests to their states?
 - School food authorities and sponsoring organizations will need to communicate plans to their state agency in advance, generally in the form of a waiver request.
 - School food authorities and sponsoring organizations may need to submit or update their application with the state agency as well.
8. Who exactly can operate meal programs in these situations?
 - SFSP and SSO operators, which include school food authorities and eligible non-profit organizations.
9. Does this apply to charter or private school closures, and could private and charter schools operate the program?
 - Yes, this would apply to charter and private school closures, but proactive communication with the state agency is recommended to ensure eligibility, target the students affected by the closure, and coordinate convenient access for students who may not live near the school.
 - If public schools in the same area have shut down and are publicly promoting the availability of meals at certain schools, or if non-profit organizations are providing

meals in the community, private and charter school students should be able to receive meals at those locations.

10. What if a school or school district was scheduled to be on spring break but is now closed? Can meals still be served through the SFSP or SSO?

- Although SFSP and SSO are *not* usually options during breaks within the school year (like spring break), if the district or state is now under an unanticipated closure due to the coronavirus, meals may be served through the SFSP or SSO.
- Although the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool component is an option during breaks within the school year, to date, states have not received waivers from the congregate meal requirement or supervised enrichment activity requirement for this program, making it an unrealistic option during closures due to the coronavirus.
- See the USDA's Q&As for additional information:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/covid-19-meal-delivery>.

11. Can new school food authorities or sponsoring organizations be approved?

- School food authorities are likely able to receive approval to operate SSO even if they have not participated in the past. Working proactively with your state agency is important in this situation.
- Waiver language currently indicates that **current** SFSP and SSO operators are able to operate non-congregate meal programs.
- School food authorities and non-profit organizations that have operated the SFSP within the current or prior two calendar years are typically permitted, with advance approval, to operate the program during unanticipated school closures. State agencies have the discretion to waive the application in this situation.
- Community-based non-profit organizations that have **not** participated in the SFSP within the past two calendar years are *unlikely* to receive approval given the usual training and pre-operational visit requirements. To date, these requirements have not been waived. However, community organizations may seek to partner with school food authorities and SFSP sponsors to help fill any unmet needs.

12. Can new sites be approved? Or can only past SFSP or SSO sites be utilized?

- It is unclear whether new sites could be approved, especially for community locations where health and safety requirements and pre-operational visits may present barriers without additional waivers.
- SFSP and SSO sites from summer 2019 are likely the best sites to reactivate.
- Sponsors should work with their state agency to determine the best course of action.

13. Where can these programs operate?

- Currently, SFSP and SSO meals can only be provided free of charge to all children 18 and under at locations that meet the area-eligibility requirement: in an area where

at least half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals according to school or census data.

- A school itself does **not** have to have more than half of its students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals as long as it is within an eligible area.
- You can use the [No Kid Hungry Averaged Area Eligibility Map](#) to determine area eligible locations. This is based on USDA guidance around the use of census data.
- If a school **cannot** qualify as area-eligible, it may be able to operate as a closed enrolled site. This would involve targeting or limiting the program to free and reduced-price eligible students. Advance communication with and approval from the state agency is critical.

14. What other program requirements will continue to apply?

- At this point, **all other usual SFSP and SSO requirements apply**, including:
 - Meal pattern requirements
 - Offer Versus Serve (OVS) is not permitted in the SFSP. Work with your state agency before implementing OVS through SSO.
 - Work with your state agency if you are experiencing issues with sourcing certain items or components.
 - Record keeping requirements
 - Daily limits on meals per child (one breakfast and one lunch or supper, **or** one meal and one snack)
 - Accommodating special dietary needs

15. What options are available for non-congregate meal service?

- Options may include home delivery; delivery along school bus routes; and meal pick-up at schools and other locations, including pick up via drive-through.
- State agencies may offer flexibility on meal times during unanticipated closures. Staggered pick-up times and other measures to minimize the number of people in the same place at one time are recommended. This will support social distancing and minimize spread of the coronavirus.
- Regarding the ability to distribute multiple meals at one time or the distribute meals without a child being present, please work directly with your state agency.
- For additional guidance, see the FNS Q&A page: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/covid-19-meal-delivery>.