



Explore What's Possible: Considerations for COVID-19 Meal Service

Schools and out-of-school time program providers can take advantage a number of program flexibilities to reach children with nutritious meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to program flexibilities issued by the USDA (see [No Kid Hungry's Waiver Summary](#)).

This checklist presents options that meals program providers may consider implementing to reach kids with three meals a day, seven days a week, during the pandemic.

Serve Multiple Days' Worth of Meals at Once

Program operators are able to serve multiple meals at the same time, to cover one or more days ([COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #1](#); [SP18-2020, SFSP10-2020](#)). Serving multiple days' worth of meals at a time may make it easier for some families to participate, but it is important to ensure that your distribution times and methods work for families if delivering or distributing meals on fewer days each week.

Serve Weekend & Holiday Meals

Sites may serve meals seven days per week -- including weekends, school breaks, and holidays -- through SFSP, SSO, and/or CACFP At-Risk Afterschool* ([SP14-2020](#)).

Serve Three Meals per Day

If approved by the state agency, sites can serve through the summer meals programs (SFSP or SSO) and afterschool programs (CACFP At-Risk or NSLP snacks)* concurrently, offering each child a breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack daily. Usual daily meal limits apply to each program ([SP14-2020](#)).

The option to serve meals through CACFP At-Risk and NSLP snacks **will expire whenever the regular school year ends, and no later than June 30, 2021.*

❑ Serve Bulk Foods

Program operators can serve items in bulk if there are instructions on portion sizes and the items can be easily separated into meals with minimal preparation ([SP13-2020](#)). Examples include distributing a half-gallon of milk for multiple days' worth of meals, a pint of strawberries, or a whole cucumber, with instructions on portion sizes. This can save production costs and enable operators to source local products more easily. View LunchAssist's [Sample 5-day Meal Kit with Bulk Foods](#) and Team Nutrition's [resources for multiple-day meal service](#) for ideas and guidance.

❑ Serve Frozen & Reheatable Meals

If households have access to proper refrigeration, stoves, microwaves, etc., program operators may be approved to serve frozen and reheatable meals ([SP13-2020](#)). This enables program operators to serve multiple days' worth of nutritious meals at a time, and removes the burden of sourcing and serving shelf-stable products only. Before serving frozen or reheatable meals, sponsors should make sure that families have proper refrigeration and freezing capacity as well as microwaves and/or stoves.

❑ Deliver Meals to Students' Homes

Program operators may serve meals via grab-n-go, curbside pick-up, mobile/bus routes, and/or home delivery. Children do not need to be present for pick-up or delivery.

❑ Partner with Nonprofits to Help Deliver Meals

To engage with an external partner to assist with meal delivery, e.g. a local nonprofit, program operators must first obtain written consent from households for their contact information to be shared with said external partner. Consent may be provided via email or other electronic means ([SP14-2020](#)). Working with local partners to coordinate meal delivery can help to stretch staff and transportation resources.



Food Services at Vaughn Next Century Learning Center fills a student's fruit order – in bulk!

❑ Survey Families to Improve Operations

Program operators can distribute surveys so that families can share the best times to pick up meals, food that they would like to see more or less of, and preferred communication channels. Ensure that surveys are in the language(s) that families feel comfortable speaking. If program staff do not speak one or more of the languages spoken in the community, they may consider asking community members for translation services and appropriately compensating for their services.

❑ Utilize All Available Communication Channels

Program operators have found success collaborating with school administrators, teachers, local media, and other trusted community partners to integrate meals information into all forms of communication to families. Here are some ideas that program operators have found successful:

- ✓ Invite families and program/school staff to participate in Zoom forums to answer questions and gather feedback about the meals program. Live streaming to Facebook can increase reach.
- ✓ Use school staff meetings to discuss the meals program and encourage staff to remind families about meal availability.
- ✓ Ask teachers to check in with students who have not picked up meals, and ask them to share any feedback they hear about how to make the meals program more accessible.
- ✓ Integrate messaging into morning announcements and Zoom calls.
- ✓ Promote your program via flyers in local newspapers and local radio ads.
- ✓ Set up robocalls and send email communication to families. No Kid Hungry's [School Meals Marketing Toolkit](#) can help.

