



FACT SHEET: SUMMER MEALS

For many kids, summertime means food, friends and fun. For families who count on school breakfast and lunch, however, the summer months can be stressful and family food budgets have to be stretched even further.

Free summer meals, funded by the USDA, are available to kids and teens ages 18 and under at thousands of summer meals sites across the country. This program has lots of room to grow:

- Of the more than 20 million students who ate free or reduced-price school lunches in 2018-2019, only 2.7 million were served summer meals in 2019. That means 6 out of 7 kids were missing out.¹
- Only 40% of families report being aware of locations where summer meals are served. However, when surveyed, 68% say they are interested in the program.²
- Of those families that have participated in summer meals, 90% say they would recommend attending the site to others and are interested in continued participation.³
- Studies show that kids are at a higher risk for both hunger and obesity during the summer months.⁴

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture funds free summer meals through the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program.

- Meals are served at thousands of sites across the U.S. that are registered with the USDA and are at safe places, such as schools, churches, and community centers.
- Families can text **'FOOD'** (English) or **'COMIDA'** (Spanish) to **877-877**; or call **1-866-3-HUNGRY** (English) or **1-877-8-HAMBRE** (Spanish) to find free summer meals nearby.
- Meals are free to kids and teens ages 18 and under – no identification or registration required.
- Sites are located in areas where 50% or more of children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Many sites offer fun learning and recreational activities, as well as free food.
- Meals served follow USDA nutrition guidelines.
- Barriers to participation include a lack of accessible summer meals sites, transportation issues due to family work schedules, not being aware of the programs, and worrying about safety of sites.
- Families don't need to apply to the program or show proof of income.

WAYS YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Summer meals programs across the country provide kids and teens with free, healthy meals so that they can continue to learn and grow during the summer. You can help. Now that summer vacation is upon us, you can:

- **Get social.** Donate your Facebook status or Twitter post to spread the word about free summer meals.
- **Advocate.** Become an advocate for the campaign by writing a letter to the editor.
- **Spread the word.** Promote the texting and phone hotlines to help children and families locate summer meals sites in your community, and download flyers to promote summer meals at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/>.
- **Support us.** Make a donation to help support the No Kid Hungry campaign.

To learn more about summer meals programs, go to the No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals>.

PARENTS ON SUMMER MEALS*

"If this program was in my area, I would take my children there."

"Kids eat up everything in the house during the summer. Feeding everyone kills your budget in the summer."

"I think programs like that are essential—necessary. We can't have kids going hungry...adults often need help."

¹Food Research & Action Center. [Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2020](#).

²2013 Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey. APCO Insight.

³Ibid.

*From focus groups conducted in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, AR; Denver, CO; and Baltimore, MD. Learn more at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/summer-meals-survey-findings>.

