



# FACT SHEET: SUMMER MEALS

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Summer is a time for connection, exploration, and fun! Summer meal programs make sure children and teens have the nutrition they need to do just that. Free summer meals, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), are available to children and teens ages 18 and under at thousands of summer meals sites across the country.

Most program providers serve summer meals using the [Summer Food Service Program](#) (SFSP) - available to schools and qualifying non-profit organizations. However, schools also can choose to serve summer meals through the [National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option](#) (SSO). To the children and families that participate, the program looks and operates the same regardless of if the provider uses SFSP or SSO.

- Meals are served at sites registered with the USDA and are at safe places, such as schools, churches, parks, and community centers.
- Meals are free to all children and teens ages 18 and under.
  - At open or drop-in meal sites, families do not need to apply to the program or show proof of income to participate.
  - At enrolled sites, meals are available for free but prior sign-up is required.
- Open 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 meals.
- At most sites, meals are served and eaten on site, known as the congregate meal service requirement.
- Beginning in summer 2023, programs operating in eligible rural areas without access to a congregate site may be able to offer meals to-go via non-congregate meal service models like grab and go, pick-up, drive-thru, and home delivery.
- Meals served follow USDA nutrition guidelines.
- Families can text 'FOOD' (to access information in English) or 'COMIDA' (to access information in Spanish) to 304-304; or call 1-866-3-HUNGRY (English) or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (Spanish) to find free summer meals nearby. They can also visit [NoKidHungry.org/whatsapp](https://NoKidHungry.org/whatsapp) to access the texting line via WhatsApp messaging service.

## OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

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

The summer meals program has a lot of opportunity to grow:

- Of the more than 18 million students who ate free or reduced-price school lunches in 2020-2021, only 5.6 million were served summer meals in 2021. That means 7 out of 10 young people were missing out.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Of those families that have participated in summer meals, 90% say they would recommend the summer meals site to others and are interested in continued participation.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies show that kids are at a higher risk for both hunger and obesity during the summer months.<sup>4</sup>

## WAYS YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Summer meals programs across the country provide children and teens with free, nutritious meals so that they can continue to learn and grow during the summer. You can help. To help more children and teens access summer meals, you can:

- **Get social.** Share information about free summer meals on social media (e.g, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).
- **Advocate.** Become an advocate for the summer meals program by writing a letter to the editor highlighting the importance of the program and available sites in your community.
- **Spread the word.** Promote the No Kid Hungry texting and phone hotlines to help children, teens, and families locate summer meals sites in your community, and download flyers to promote summer meals with No Kid Hungry's [Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#).
- **Support us.** [Make a donation](#) to help support the No Kid Hungry campaign.

You can learn more about summer meals programs on the No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices website at [bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals](https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals).

## HELP SPREAD THE WORD

There are many ways to help spread the word about summer meals in your community.

### No Kid Hungry's Free Meal Finder Map and Texting Service

- Access the **Free Meal Finder Map** at [NoKidHungry.org/help](https://NoKidHungry.org/help) (to access information in English) or [NoKidHungry.org/ayuda](https://NoKidHungry.org/ayuda) (to access information in Spanish) to find free summer meals and other sources of no cost food and groceries.
- Families can text 'FOOD' (to access information in English) or 'COMIDA' (to access information in Spanish) to 304-304; or call 1-866-3-HUNGRY (English) or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (Spanish) to find free summer meals nearby. They can also visit [NoKidHungry.org/whatsapp](https://NoKidHungry.org/whatsapp) to access the texting line via WhatsApp messaging service.

### Share with Your Community

- You can find sample social media posts, graphics, flyers, and more with No Kid Hungry's [Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#).
- Consider posting to social media, sharing flyers with local businesses and religious institutions, and asking local news media to highlight the program and nearby sites in your area.

***Download materials and share with your community leading up to and throughout summer!***

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<sup>1</sup>Food Research & Action Center. [Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2022](#).

<sup>2</sup>2013 Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey. APCO Insight.

