

MENU PLANNING FOR NON-CONGREGATE MEALS: WEBINAR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



This provides answers to the questions that were answered in writing via Zoom during the live webinar on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 as well as some additional clarification and elaboration on answers provided live. This also offers easy-to-click hyperlinks to documents referenced in the Q&A.

1. Can you provide more information about the produce distribution you mentioned?

- a. The Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program (FFVP) is available to elementary schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program. It introduces young students to new types of produce as snacks between meals at school. See <https://www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp/fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-program> for more background.
- b. For guidance on how schools currently approved to operate the FFVP can continue providing produce during school closures related to COVID-19, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19/ffvp-during-covid19>.
- c. Also, many states have requested and been approved for a [waiver](#) to allow schools to distribute produce through FFVP to parents without their child present. Due to the way that the Families First Coronavirus Response Act was written, that cannot be granted as a nationwide waiver.

2. Is it possible to serve three meals and a snack per day (breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack)? Can we serve snacks through the Afterschool Snack Program?

- a. The USDA did waive the requirement for afterschool care or activities in both the Child and Adult Care Food Program's At-Risk Afterschool Meals component and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Afterschool Snack Program. This, in combination with other waivers, allows operators to continue offering meals or snacks through those programs, even if the usual activities are cancelled or remote. See <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-afterschool-activity-waiver> for the waiver.
 - i. The requirement for afterschool snacks to be served through NSLP only on school days did not appear to be waived, so schools might be limited to serving snacks through NSLP on or for distance learning days. Check with your state agency to confirm.
- b. It is possible to serve three meals and a snack per child per day at one location by utilizing a combination of programs:
 - i. Operators approved for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO) can provide two meals or snacks (except for lunch and supper) per child per day, typically breakfast and lunch.
 1. Alternatively, some schools may be operating the NSLP and School Breakfast Program to provide breakfast and lunch on distance learning days.
 - ii. Operators approved for the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals component may provide any one meal and/or snack per child per day, typically a supper and snack.
 - iii. Operators approved for both can serve through both concurrently as long as different meals are served through each and in accordance with each program's daily maximums.
 1. So, a site could provide a breakfast and lunch through SFSP and a supper and snack through CACFP At-Risk Afterschool but **not** two breakfasts, a lunch, and snack.
 - iv. Current guidance allows operators to serve multiple meals at a time for multiple days at a time.

3. How many meals can you distribute at one time? Could you provide a breakfast and lunch through SSO or SFSP and then supper in the same bag under CACFP At-Risk between 11:00 am-12:30 pm?
 - a. Under the current nationwide waivers and guidance, you can serve more than one meal at the same time and meals for up to a week at the same time. This includes both SFSP or SSO and CACFP At-Risk.
 - b. So, yes, you can bag all three meals (or three meals and snack) together or provide a five or seven-day meal kit with all meals and/or snacks included.
 4. Can we continue offering meals and/or snacks through CACFP At-Risk Afterschool through the summer? If not, when does that end?
 - a. CACFP At-Risk Afterschool is limited to the school year, so it is **not** possible to operate the program during the summer vacation. Only year-round schools and sites serving year-round schools could continue to operate. This requirement, to date, has not been waived.
 - b. Some states have interpreted the [waiver extending unanticipated school closure operations](#) until June 30, 2020 as extending CACFP At-Risk Afterschool to June 30th, regardless of the school calendar or closure status. Please check with your state agency to confirm that they have opted in to this waiver, and if so, what their interpretation is.
 5. Will there be an extended waiver allowing closed sites in the SFSP or SSO to be open sites?
 - a. States have all received waivers from the area eligibility requirement, allowing meal distribution sites located in areas that fall below the 50 percent free or reduced-price eligibility threshold to function as open sites. States have implemented this slightly differently; for example, some lowered the percentage threshold while others ask or allow sponsors to reference recent unemployment or economic data to justify a location.
 - b. To our knowledge, all of these waivers expire on June 30, 2020, and none have been extended.
 - c. We do not have a timeline for when USDA might announce extensions or if they plan to do so at all. We are advocating for extensions.
 6. Do you have a list of states that have the one type of milk waiver separate than the meal pattern flexibility waiver? What about states that allow you to not offer milk?
 - a. You can see which states have opted in to the meal pattern waiver at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-meal-pattern-flexibility-waiver>.
 - b. States may, **without** a waiver, approve operators to serve meals without milk if operators cannot obtain milk due to emergency conditions, or serve only one type of milk through the NSLP or SSO – see questions #1-2 in the USDA's [Q&A #3 on meal service during the coronavirus outbreak](#). We do not have a list of states choosing to do that.
 7. Do you have cost estimates for packaging? I know it varies a lot with specific operations.
 - a. [From Miguel Villarreal] Yes, it varies depending on what you are serving. You can try to balance the cost of packaging with the cost of food items that you use. It's important to look at every penny that is being spent. I will always spend more money on food than packaging, though. In other words, I would spend more for organic or local foods before I would consider a high-priced compostable packaging item.
 8. What tips do you have related to sending home bulk food, both for School Food Authorities (SFAs) and families receiving meals?
 - a. [From Jennifer McNeil] Here are some best practices to consider:
 - i. Include cooking or preparation instructions and food safety information
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- ii. Offer foods that require minimal prep and minimal cooking facilities (perhaps just a microwave)
- iii. Offer an alternative shelf stable kit for families that might have limited access to refrigeration, cooking facilities, or who prefer that option for another reason.

California created a wonderful bulk meals flyer for SFAs that is available here:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/documents/bulkfoodsfactsheet.pdf>

We also have a 5-day meal kit template in our Emergency Meal Service Toolkit on www.lunchassist.org/covid-19

9. How do you determine what type of cooking equipment families have? Many may not be able to reheat or take finished food temperatures.
- a. [From Jennifer McNeil] This is a *super* important consideration. Best practice would be to always have an alternative shelf stable or cold meal kit that is ready to eat and doesn't require any cooking, reheating or other preparation. Twin Rivers USD offers a meal kit that has frozen items to cook, but they always have a shelf stable option on the side if anyone prefers that instead. It could be due to lack of cooking or refrigeration, for families struggling with homelessness, or simply because parents prefer something ready to eat for their children.
 - b. [From No Kid Hungry] To support food safety, many operators offering reheatable meals or cold meals have sent home food safety guidance along with the meals or meal kit. These might tell families which items need to be refrigerated, how many days items may be stored, which items need to be reheated, whether items should be transferred to other containers or dishes before heating, and how long to reheat foods. Instructions for stirring to prevent cold spots and heating until steaming may be more practical for families instead of or in addition to specific temperature guidance.
10. For Miguel Villarreal: Where did you locate the cooking instructions?
- a. [From Miguel Villarreal] We have labels that are placed directly on the sleeve we are using for the food product. We have also started providing a 1 sheet document with storing and cooking instructions.
11. For Miguel Villarreal: Would you please share who you purchased the large carts from?
- a. [From Miguel Villarreal] We have had these carts since I started in the district last July. Please send me an email at mvillarreal@srvusd.net and I will send you our source.
12. For Miguel Villarreal: You mentioned that your staff started off placing meals in car trunks but then changed to having parents or students pick up the meals. Why was that? Is there more information that can be shared?
- a. [From Miguel Villarreal] We did that for safety reasons: the staff was touching every vehicle, and we thought that we could keep our staff safer by having families pick up their own meals that were placed in a safe area.
 - b. [From No Kid Hungry] An important note is that did **not** switch to personally handing off meals to families and getting within six feet of them. See the LunchAssist and Center for Ecoliteracy [resource infographic](#) on having a separate staging table and service table so that families can approach the service table while the staff stay further away.
13. What time of day is most productive for Grab n Go distributions?
- a. [From Miguel Villarreal] Ours is from 11:30 am - 1:00 pm. That has been working for our community.
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- b. [From No Kid Hungry] This may vary depending on your community. You might find that morning or late afternoon/evening is better, especially if there are many parents who are considered essential workers and not available to pick up meals midday.
 - 14. Do you have any information on procedures or best practices for reopening school nutrition services after COVID-19? Both at the school division and state levels?
 - a. [From Miguel Villarreal] We are working on those procedures at the moment. What I do know is that plans will vary widely from school district to school district.
 - b. [From No Kid Hungry] We are also still in the process of developing tools and resources to support operations next school year. Some of it may depend on what authority the USDA has to continue offering waivers, though.
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