

Guidance for Operating Child Nutrition Programs when Schools are Closed due to COVID-19

GENERAL

1. What options are available to provide meals to children during school closures?

In the event that a school has been closed due to COVID-19, School Food Authorities (SFA) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sponsors can opt to offer meals through the SFSP or Seamless Summer Option (SSO), subject to waiver application approval by Child Nutrition. For ease of transition, we recommend that SFAs operate the SSO unless they have operated the SFSP in either of the prior two calendar years as additional application requirements apply. Please contact Child Nutrition (CN) at CNCOVID@nysed.gov or 518-473-8781 to discuss additional application requirements.

Additional information regarding SSO and SFSP can be found on the [SSO/SFSP Comparison Chart](#).

If the waiver application is approved, meals are not required to be served or consumed at a school location. SFAs and SFSP sponsors can develop a system to serve meals in a manner that best fits the situation.

2. How do SFAs apply to serve meals during closures?

SFAs must complete the [SSO/SFSP COVID-19 application](#). The application must be emailed to CNCOVID@nysed.gov. SFAs will be notified via email of application approval. SED is available to provide technical assistance to SFAs and SFSP sponsors in processing the application.

3. When should the SFA submit an application to provide meals to children during school closures?

SFAs are encouraged to submit their application in advance of a COVID-19 related school closure. Applications must be approved by SED prior to dispersing meals.

4. Is it mandatory school districts offer meals under this program during a school closure?

No. However, SFAs and SFSP sponsors are encouraged to ensure that the needs of children who rely on the two meals a day served at school are met during extended school closures.

5. What are the required steps once a school has been closed?

Email CNCOVID@nysed.gov the dates meals will be served during closure. CN Representatives will work with SFAs and SFSP sponsors to gather necessary information and provide guidance.

6. Is there a minimum timeframe for closure before meals can be served?

SFAs and SFSP sponsors determine when to begin serving meals once a school is closed as a result of COVID-19. SFAs and SFSP sponsors may decide whether to provide meals immediately when schools are closed or delay implementation.

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7. If a school opens and closes more than once, can an SFSP or SSO approved application be used for more than one closure?

Yes, schools may need to close for multiple periods of time. SFAs will need to send an email to CNCOVID@nysed.gov each time meals will be served during closures.

8. How would families know where and when to obtain a meal?

SFAs must communicate to families on how and when the meals will be distributed (e.g., on the school district website, robocalls, 211 Hotline).

9. If our SFA is currently not an SFSP sponsor, can we still apply to use SFSP option?

Yes, SFAs can opt to claim meals as an SFSP sponsor during school closures. For ease of transition, we recommend that SFAs operate the SSO unless they have operated the SFSP in either of the prior two calendar years as additional application requirements apply.

MEAL DISTRIBUTION AND ELIGIBILITY

10. What distribution methods are envisioned for COVID-19 meal service?

We anticipate the meal distribution methods will be either grab-and-go or delivery models in order to meet the need for social distancing. When implementing grab-and-go we suggest staggering mealtimes. Schools should contact their local partners such as county emergency management offices to coordinate assistance with meal delivery or other county sites for distribution.

11. Who is eligible to receive meals when school is closed due to COVID-19?

The SSO/SFSP COVID-19 waiver is targeted to children who attend schools that have been closed due to COVID-19. However, in eligible areas, meals may be served to all children 18 and under in the household if at least one child attends the closed school. If a childcare center that participates in the CACFP is in a closed school area, children enrolled in that center are eligible for meals provided by the closed school.

12. How do SSO/SFSP site eligibility requirements apply to COVID-19 meal service? Must all schools served be in low-income areas?

For closed schools with 50 percent or more of their enrolled students certified eligible for free or reduced-price meals, SFAs may develop meal distribution methods in which meals are available to all children enrolled in that school, with a focus on serving low income children. For closed schools with less than 50 percent free or reduced-price enrollment, meal distribution methods must more directly target the households of enrolled children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Schools should use current free/reduced price certification information or, if necessary, depending on the timing of the school closures, immediate prior year eligibility certifications.

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13. How many meals per child may be offered each day? May supper be provided? Can meals be distributed for more than one day?

The maximum number of meals that may be offered remains the same as under SFSP or SSO: up to two meals, or one meal and one snack, per child, per day, in any combination except lunch and supper. CN may approve a distribution approach that includes meals for multiple days. CN will consider the capacity of the SFA or SFSP sponsor to execute such an approach effectively, including meeting food safety requirements.

14. Can a bus be used to drop off meals to students?

Yes, a variety of distribution methods can be used. SFAs must ensure that meals served meet food safety requirements. The distribution method must be fully described in the application.

15. Can we serve parents and other adults in the community if they pay for the meal?

If the SFA or SFSP sponsor has the capacity to provide meals to adults, they may do so but will not be reimbursed for those meals. Meals delivered to the home may be provided only for children in the family 18 and under. Additionally, we encourage you to work with your community to identify resources to address the needs of low-income parents.

16. Can a parent/caregiver of a child enrolled in the closed school pick up meals for all the children in the household?

Yes, if the meal distribution site has a way to verify that the adult picking up meals has an enrolled child in the closed school, this would be permissible. This arrangement should be indicated on the application.

ACCOUNTABILITY

17. Will there be any separate reporting requirements for meals served to children under the SSO/SFSP COVID-19 waiver or will the standard meal count reporting procedures apply?

Separate meal counts (breakfast, lunch, supper and/or snack) and records must be maintained for meals served under a COVID-19 waiver. To receive reimbursement, total meals served must be reported to CN.

18. How can a school with less than 50 percent free and reduced-price eligibility target low-income children without overtly identifying those children as eligible for free or reduced-price meals?

This will depend in large part on how the SFA or SFSP sponsors intend to provide meals. The application should describe their method of meal distribution. For example, meal distribution sites might be in areas that are easily accessible to low-income children (e.g., housing authority, community centers, etc.), therefore, avoiding identification of individual children as low income.

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19. What are the requirements for the meals?

The meals must meet the regular menu planning requirements of the SFSP or SSO. Offer versus serve (OVS) will not apply and all meals must be unitized, meaning a complete reimbursable meal that meets the requirements of the menu planning method used, including milk, must be distributed. Shelf-stable milk may be used. USDA commodity foods may also be used. If availability of milk or other meal components becomes an issue, SED will work with USDA to provide the needed waivers or flexibility. SED should be notified immediately if an issue arises.

20. What meal pattern is followed when utilizing SSO?

SFAs opting to utilize SSO must follow the NSLP and/or SBP meal pattern.

21. Are we required to accommodate documented special dietary needs?

Yes. This should be addressed in the SFA or SFSP sponsors waiver request.

MEAL COUNTING AND CLAIMING

22. How does the SFA submit claims for meals served during closures?

SFAs will file claims for reimbursement through the Child Nutrition Management System. All meals served under SSO and SFSP are claimed under the free meal category.

23. How are meals served during school closure claimed for Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2 schools?

All meals served during the closures will be claimed at the free rate, regardless of the provision status.

We will continue to update this guidance to support continued access of meals to low-income children affected by school closures due to COVID-19.