

School Nutrition Program Meal Service during Coronavirus (COVID-19) Unanticipated School Closures

Question and Answers

1. May schools serve meals during closures related to the Coronavirus?

Yes. In anticipation of school closures, the MDE Office of Child Nutrition (OCN) has secured two waivers from the USDA. These waivers allow all schools to serve meals to students during an unanticipated school closure through provisions of the Summer Food Service (SFSP)

2. Is it mandatory that meals be provided during a school closure?

No. However, SFAs are encouraged to support the needs of MS children, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, as there may be limited access to food during extended periods of school closure.

3. How do schools apply to serve meals during closures related to the Coronavirus?

The OCN has implemented an expedited two step approval process to allow schools to begin serving meals as quickly as possible.

Before serving meals, the School Food Authority (SFA) must complete Step 1 of the Unanticipated School Closure approval process, details may be found here: <https://www.mdek12.org/OCN>

Step 2, completion of the full agreement in MARS, will occur when all initial requests have been processed. SFAs may begin the MARS application process immediately if they choose.

4. May schools serve grab and Go meals?

Yes, Schools may serve non-congregate meals, such as grab and go meals, during the Coronavirus emergency. The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has waived the requirement at 7 CFR 225.6(e)(15) that meals be served and consumed in a congregate setting, in order to support any social distancing requested by Federal, State, or local authorities.

5. Can a school with less than 50 percent (50%) free and reduced-price eligibility participate?

Yes, for dismissed schools with less than 50% free or reduced enrollment, meal distribution methods must more directly target the households of enrolled children who are eligible for free or reduced priced meals. It is recommended to use a roster or take children's names of enrolled students when they receive a meal(s). As much as possible, continue with standard POS practices.

6. How can a school with less than 50 percent (50%) free and reduced-price eligibility target economically disadvantaged children without overtly identifying those children as eligible for free or reduced-price meals?

This will depend in large part on how SFAs intend to provide meals and should be described in the method of meal distribution on Form B. For example, meal distribution sites might be located in areas that are easily accessible to low-income children while avoiding identification of individual children as

low income. Bus routes may be implemented in lower income areas. Reminders that free meals are available during the school closure may be sent to the parents of all F/R eligible students.

Reminder: Requests to operate sites 50 percent (50%) free and reduced-price eligibility must be approved by OCN before meals are served.

7. What are the requirements for the meals?

The meals must meet the regular menu planning requirements of the SFSP. 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, contact Bill Urban burban@mdek12.org OCN will work with USDA for possible waivers or other flexibilities should food availability become an issue.

8. How many meals per child may be offered each day? May supper be provided?

The maximum number of meals that may be offered remains the same as under the SFSP: up to two (2) meals, or one (1) meal and one (1) snack, per child, per day, in any combination except lunch and supper for open or closed enrolled sites. SFAs/Sponsors may serve breakfast, lunch, snack or supper in any combination except lunch and supper.

9. Can meals be distributed for more than one day?

OCN may approve a distribution approach that includes meals for multiple days per week. OCN will consider the capacity of the SFAs to execute such an approach effectively, including meeting food safety requirements. Such distribution requires prior approval, in writing, by OCN.

10. What distribution methods are envisioned for Coronavirus (COVID-19) meal service, and what logistical issues should be considered?

We anticipate meal distribution methods will involve pick up or delivery models in order to meet the need for social distancing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) unanticipated school closures. If employing a method other than Grab and Go, delivery methods must be documented in the SFA's Unanticipated School Closure Form B: <https://www.mdek12.org/OCN>

Options may include using a vehicle to deliver meals based on the usual bus route, drive-thru windows or stations, and other options that support the service of safe and wholesome reimbursable meals to students.

11. Are transportation costs eligible for reimbursement in the event that school systems decide to deliver meals?

No, there is no mechanism for reimbursement of transportation costs. While an allowable expense for the SFSP, funds available for transportation will be minimal after food, supplies, and labor costs.

12. Can the LEA use school buses to deliver meals to students during unanticipated closure?

Yes, LEAs may choose to use school buses to deliver meals to students during periods of unanticipated school closure. Please coordinate with your Superintendent and Transportation Director to ensure compliance with laws that govern the use of buses.

13. Is notification to households still required during this time?

Yes. Schools must notify households of the availability of meals at specified sites and times through normal means (i.e. flyers posted at schools, school system websites, etc.).

14. What are some suggested solutions for staffing sites during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) school closure?

SFAs/Sponsors are encouraged to collaborate with a variety of school, civic, governmental and community organizations for help with serving eligible children. Some suggestions include Police and Fire Departments, hunger solution organizations, teachers, parents, and other volunteers. Basic food safety instructions and precautions should be provided to anyone who will assist with meal delivery.

15. With the potential for school nutrition staff shortages, and the need for students to be fed, can other staff assist with prepping and serving meals? Volunteers, teachers, etc.?

Yes, according to the Food Code, "**Employee**" means the PERMIT HOLDER, PERSON IN CHARGE, FOOD EMPLOYEE, PERSON having supervisory or management duties, PERSON on the payroll, family member, volunteer, PERSON performing work under contractual agreement, or other PERSON working in a FOOD ESTABLISHMENT. Reminder: only employees and volunteers directly involved in the production and distribution of meals will be eligible for "in-kind" meals.

It is prudent for the Person-in-Charge (PIC) to use the HACCP Plan new employee checklist or some other training tool with any volunteer employee to ensure some level of basic food safety instruction.