
Becoming COVID Capable:

Addressing Food and Meals Access for Housing Communities

The closure of school districts across the United States due to the COVID-19 health crisis puts millions of children at risk of hunger as a result of discontinued access to school breakfast and lunch programs. School districts, local governments, and community-based agencies can operate the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Feeding Option (SSFO) of the National School Lunch Program to provide free emergency meals at school and community-based sites to all children and teens 18 and under. Unlike in summer, these emergency meals do not need to be eaten in a congregate setting.

For many families facing barriers to transportation or who are unable to access school meal sites due to health, safety, or other reasons, **public and affordable housing communities may be ideal meal distribution sites.**

What are the benefits?

“Grab and Go” meals and/or snacks for children and teens allow families to minimize the risk of exposure, stay healthy, and lessen the financial burden of food costs on low-wage caregivers. By becoming a meals distribution site, you will:

- Increase accessibility of critical meals for your residents.
- Provide a communication and engagement opportunity with residents.
- Help schools reach more of their students with nutritious meals.

How would it work?

More often than not, school districts act as the meal provider. In some communities, however, the meal provider may be a city agency or community-based organization. Each meal provider may have a slightly different process, but here is the overall structure:

- The meal provider provides pre-packaged meals to the site (e.g., housing community) for “Grab and Go” distribution to children (ages 1-12) and teens (13-18).
- Housing community staff, volunteer(s), or meal provider staff are tasked with distributing meals and other administrative tasks (e.g., counting meals served, following health and safety protocols, maintaining appropriate meal temperature, etc.).
- Caregivers may pick up meals for their children. Children do not need to be present.

What meals can be served?

Some school districts are providing lunch for that day, while others may provide meals for multiple days. Because this is uncharted territory, this may vary by meal provider. **The program regulations allow the serving of breakfast, snack, lunch or supper, or any combination of two (except lunch and supper).** Meals must follow USDA nutritional and meal pattern guidelines.

What protocols are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

USDA Child Nutrition Programs already follow strict health and safety guidelines. Due to the gravity of this situation, school districts are implementing additional protocols to support social distancing and minimize contact to protect staff and families. Ask your school district/meal provider about current protocols and expectations. Meals may not be eaten in a congregate setting or must follow appropriate social distancing guidelines.

How can my agency get involved?

The first step is contacting your school district nutrition director to let them know that your agency is interested in becoming a meal site. It will be helpful to let the director know:

- **How many children are at your site / how many children you would expect to serve each day.** Remember this can include very young children who may not yet be in preschool or kindergarten (ages 1 all the way through 18).
- **Do you have staff / volunteers that can distribute meals?** School district staffing is stretched very thin right now. Your school district may need someone to come pick up the meals.

Important Notes:

- **There is no cost for housing communities to provide these meals to children.**
- This is evolving. Your school district/meal provider will have more specific details about how this would work in your community. You may also refer to the California Department of Education's guidance [here](#). Housing agencies in other states can contact their state agency for more information.
- **Food is available to ANY child age 18 and under (including young children eating solid food). They do not need to be enrolled at a particular school to receive food.**
- Meals are only for children and teens. However, if your housing has adult residents who are older than 18 and have intellectual/physical disability [and are enrolled in a school educational program](#), they may receive meals as well. Your local food bank may be able to provide supplementary food for adults.
- Home delivery may be possible. More information is [available here](#).
- Like during summer, it is crucial to follow SFSP/SSFO guidelines and regulations to ensure food safety and maintain proper paperwork so that meal providers can be reimbursed for meals.
- No ServeSafe certification (meal handling certificate) is required since the meals are pre-packaged.
- Americorps may be able to provide volunteer(s) to assist in this effort.
- Adult volunteers may also receive a meal.

CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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