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# MEETING FOOD NEEDS DURING PANDEMIC FLU OUTBREAK

## Options for Schools and Communities

### WHEN SCHOOLS CLOSE

Schools in your community may close in order to minimize the children's risk of exposure to illness. If that happens, the school district should make every effort to provide meals to children through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In addition, schools should provide information on other ways families may obtain nutrition assistance during an outbreak.

### OPERATING THE SFSP OR THE SSO

To facilitate providing meals during an outbreak, USDA is allowing State agencies to waive certain requirements so that schools have the ability to provide meals during unexpected school closings relating to an H1N1 outbreak.

In collaboration with their State agency, school food authorities (SFAs) should develop waiver requests to operate a modified SFSP/SSO to assist children, especially those in low-income families. Having an approved waiver in place is vital to rapid response. Waiver requests should address:

- which schools will be targeted;
- how meals will be distributed to limit contact;
- how food safety will be ensured;
- how the availability of meals will be publicized
- logistical strategies such as staffing, oversight, meal preparation

SFAs should also consider partnerships with community groups, especially those with experience with operating the SFSP.

### OTHER SOURCES OF NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

#### *LOCAL FOOD BANKS, FOOD PANTRIES AND/OR SOUP KITCHENS*

Information on local food banks, food pantries and/or soup kitchens can be obtained from a school's homeless liaison, school district social worker, or local department of social services. Many food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens have on-line search capabilities and toll-free numbers that can direct you to food assistance in your community.

Faith based organizations may also be of assistance in providing food to vulnerable children who receive free and reduced price meals. Information to families should include not only the name and location of the food bank/pantry/kitchen, but also operating hours and any other information needed to access their benefits.

#### *THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)*

Formerly the Food Stamp Program, SNAP may also be available to families in your community. Schools can work with their local SNAP offices to obtain outreach information and materials on how to apply. Contact your local SNAP office to see if special procedures apply. You can find information about your local SNAP office through [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/applicant_recipients/apply.htm)

You can review “10 Steps to Help You Fill Your Grocery Bag through SNAP” at [www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/10steps.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/10steps.htm)

### ***OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMS***

Other programs in your community may provide food assistance. For example, some schools and community organizations participate in privately-funded “backpack” programs that send food home with children for evenings and/or weekends. If such resources exist in your community, you may wish to coordinate with these program operators to provide information on how families can access these benefits.

Because schools are an integral and trusted part of the community, they are well positioned to serve as quick and effective sources of information for families who need assistance. USDA strongly recommends that schools use the communication channels available to them, including websites, e-mail distribution lists, automated phone calling systems, and flyers to share this information with families.

## **ASSISTING FAMILIES DURING QUARANTINE-LIKE CIRCUMSTANCES**

In some communities, the risk of illness may result in steps being taken to try to keep people from gathering in groups to help slow the spread of the infection. This may result in a need for special food preparation/delivery methods to assist those who are unable to obtain food through the usual channels (especially those vulnerable to illness).

As your community develops its plan for responding to such situations, schools and certain nutrition program resources may be able to play an important role:

### ***USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR FOOD PREPARATION***

In addition to providing meals to enrolled children, schools may be able to assist communities in other ways. For example, when volunteer organizations and other community resources prepare and deliver meals or food packages to families in need, schools may serve as preparation facilities. Check with your local health authorities to make sure your efforts comply with the appropriate requirements. Schools using food service management companies should explore whether their contracts with these organizations allow the schools to provide any kind of support for such efforts.

### ***USE OF SCHOOL FOODS***

Under some circumstances, it may be possible to use foods originally intended for use in the school meal programs for these purposes, without a loss to the school. Your State Education Agency or State Department of Agriculture may be able to allow foods provided directly by USDA (“commodity foods”) to be used in meals for distribution to families outside of the school meal programs if the community is in a Presidentially-declared emergency or disaster area. The school would later receive replacement of USDA foods to make up for the lost resources to the school meal programs.

Please see the Food Distribution site at [www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fd-disasters/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fd-disasters/default.htm) and check with your appropriate State agency to see whether this approach is possible in your community.

In addition, if a Presidential disaster is declared, you may be able to use foods purchased locally by your school (that is, not provided directly by USDA) for the special feeding efforts. The school may be eligible for reimbursement for the cost of such food from the State as part of the reimbursement by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Again, it is very important to check with your State authorities before taking this approach, to ensure that it is authorized and to determine what kind of record-keeping or other requirements apply.

When it is not feasible for the school to reuse leftover food or when food won't hold safely until school reopens, the school may redistribute the excess food in a manner that is permitted by State and local health and safety laws. This could include making the food available to a community food bank, homeless shelter, or other community or school organization.

For more information on USDA Foods for Disasters in your State, go to:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm)