

## Nationwide Child Nutrition Waivers

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) gives the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to issue nationwide waivers to ensure access to meals through the child nutrition programs as communities respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to issue waivers to increase cost. In order for a state to use a nationwide waiver, the state child nutrition agency must notify their USDA Regional Office that it elects to use the waiver. The guidance directs State agencies to inform local program operators of the flexibilities provided by these waivers as quickly as possible and to work in partnership with schools, local government agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and other entities that operate the child nutrition programs to provide accessible meals to all participants safely.

Prior to implementing any of the following waivers or providing meals through the child nutrition programs, schools and other program operators should receive approval from their state child nutrition agency in order to ensure that the meals served will be reimbursed. All of the waivers listed below are in effect until June 30, 2020.

- **[Non-Congregate Feeding](#)**: Allows meals to be provided outside of a congregate feeding setting. Meals can be distributed at a site where families pick up the meals, as well as be delivered to children's homes. USDA has provided additional [guidance](#) on meal delivery. The state child nutrition agency needs to sign off on the distribution model. In addition, USDA did not issue a separate nationwide waiver to provide multiple meals, but its [guidance](#) on Child Nutrition Program Meal Service during COVID-19 Outbreak gives State agencies the authority to approve methods that include meals for multiple days. The waiver applies to all of the federal child nutrition programs: School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

- **Meal Service Times**: Provides flexibility to the meal service time requirements. The waiver applies to all of the federal child nutrition programs: SBP, NSLP, SFSP, and CACFP.
  - **Activity Requirement in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs**: Eliminates the requirement to provide educational or enrichment activities when providing snacks through NSLP or meals and snacks through the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Program.
  - **Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals for Children**: Allows a parent or guardian to pick up meals and take home to children. State agencies are required to create a plan that ensures accountability and program integrity. The waiver applies to all of the federal child nutrition programs: SBP, NSLP, SFSP, and CACFP.
  - **Meal Pattern Flexibility in the Child Nutrition Programs**: Waives the requirements to serve meals that meet the meal pattern requirements. While the waiver is available to all states, program sponsors must submit requests to their State agency for approval that demonstrate disruptions to the availability of food products. The waiver applies to all of the federal child nutrition programs: SBP, NSLP, SFSP, and CACFP.
- Community Eligibility Deadline Waiver**: Extends the April 1 deadline to calculate the Identified Student Percentage to anytime between April 1 and June 30; the April 15 notification deadline from April 15 to June 15; the May 1 deadline for states to notify school districts that they are eligible or near-eligible to June 15; and the June 30 deadline for school districts to elect community eligibility to August 31.
- **Monitoring Requirements for School Food Authorities and State Agencies in the School Meals Programs**: Waives for all school food authorities (SFAs) and State agencies the requirement that monitoring must be conducted on-site. SFAs and State agencies should continue monitoring activities remotely.

- **Monitoring Requirements for [Sponsoring Organizations](#) and [State Agencies](#) in SFSP:** Waives for all sponsors and State agencies the requirement that SFSP monitoring be conducted on-site. This includes new sponsor, annual, and pre-approval reviews. Sponsors and State agencies should continue monitoring activities remotely.
- **Monitoring Requirements for [Sponsors](#) and [State Agencies](#) in CACFP:** Reduces the number of site reviews CACFP sponsors must conduct from three to two; reduces the number of unannounced site reviews from three to one; waives the requirement that at least one site review must be conducted during meal service; and waives the requirement that no more than six months passes between site reviews. Waives the requirement for State agencies that CACFP monitoring be conducted on-site. Sponsors and State agencies should continue monitoring activities remotely.

States that use one or more of the nationwide waivers must submit a report to USDA that summarizes the use of the waiver(s) and describes the role that the waiver(s) played in improving services to program participants.

These nationwide waivers offer important opportunities to ensure access to meals during this crisis, but additional nationwide waivers may be needed to ensure equal treatment for children across the nation and to reduce the administrative work that is required in order for State agencies to submit waivers and for USDA and State agencies to approve waivers state by state. For example, 31 states have received an area eligibility waiver for Summer Food, but low-income children in the other states do not have this access. If USDA has not issued a nationwide waiver to overcome a barrier to meal access that a State agency identifies, it can apply for a state waiver, and advocates, schools, program operators, and sponsors should encourage their states to apply for waivers that will support access to meals.

FRAC will update this document as additional nationwide waivers are issued. For more information on efforts and opportunities to ensure children have access to nutritious meals during COVID-19 school closures, visit [FRAC's website](#).