



Food and
Nutrition
Service

DATE: March 9, 2021

Braddock
Metro Center

CODE: COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #73

1320
Braddock
Place
Alexandria
VA 22314

SUBJECT: Child Nutrition Waiver Update

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

This memo is to announce extensions of needed flexibilities for summer 2021 operations for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

As we complete a full year of Child Nutrition Program operations during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we want to acknowledge the creativity, dedication, and tireless efforts of program operators and administrators at all levels to ensure access to healthy meals during what has been, for many of us, one of the most challenging years of our lifetimes. Over the past year, the Child Nutrition Program community has overcome a myriad of obstacles and has continued to provide daily meals for millions of our nation's children and vulnerable adults. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) extends a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has dedicated time and energy in service to their communities through the Child Nutrition Programs over this past year.

In response to the needs of program operators and State administrators, FNS has released a series of waivers to maximize flexibility and limit exposure to COVID-19, while maintaining accountability. The waivers are currently scheduled to expire on June 30, 2021, the statutory end of the school year. These flexibilities will remain necessary to operate our programs this summer given the ongoing public health and economic crisis. Understanding that program operators are now planning how to best deploy child nutrition programs during the upcoming summer months, FNS is issuing the following updated waivers specifically for summer meal program operations in 2021. Please note that the current waivers are in effect through June 30, 2021 and that the waivers listed below are effective beginning July 1, 2021:

- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Meal Pattern Flexibilities for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Non-Congregate Feeding for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals for Children for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver to Extend Area Eligibility Waivers for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver of Meal Service Time Restrictions for Summer 2021 Operations

- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Offer Versus Serve Flexibilities in the Summer Food Service Program for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Area Eligibility for Closed Enrolled Sites for Summer 2021 Operations
- Nationwide Waiver to Waive First Week Site Visits in the Summer Food Service Program for Summer 2021 Operations

Program operators and administrators at all levels have successfully adapted to rapidly changing environments and have learned best practices for maintaining program operations during an unprecedented and ongoing emergency. These experiences provide the basis for an enhanced focus on consistently offering the most nutritious meals possible under the circumstances. Effective July 1, 2021, the regular SFSP meal pattern requirements will be in place for that program. While the current SFSP meal pattern waiver will remain in place until June 30, 2021 to provide time to transition, operators should strive to meet the standards as soon as possible. FNS will continue to offer an NSLP meal pattern waiver for summer 2021, and this flexibility will also continue to apply to SSO operations for summer 2021. Because so many children will be relying on meals provided by these programs as a consistent source of nutrition, we strongly encourage program operators to provide meals that not only meet program standards but also support a nutritious and varied diet. We understand that unique challenges will continue to arise during this period of uncertainty. We encourage program operators to use flexibilities available to meet the SFSP meal pattern requirements and State agencies to continue to adapt their technical assistance and oversight approaches to reflect local circumstances.

FNS stands ready to provide technical assistance and support necessary to help Program operators serve nutritious, high-quality meals throughout the remaining months of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. FNS has developed a range of Team Nutrition materials, designed to support program operations and service of nutritious meals during the pandemic; please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn> and <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/covid19-resources> for access to the wide variety of materials.

While this memo pertains specifically to summer meals, more guidance on the 2021-2022 school year is forthcoming. FNS expects that some flexibilities will still be necessary as schools continue to transition back to the classroom. To that end, FNS is considering the best options for supporting schools in their efforts toward reopening, while ensuring children continue to receive nutritious, high-quality meals. We understand that time is of the essence, as planning for the next school year has already begun. We anticipate providing school year 2021-2022 guidance as soon as possible so that USDA may support the reopening of America's schools in fall 2021.

Sincerely,

Original Signed

Angela M. Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division