

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Child Nutrition Program Meal Service During COVID-19 Outbreak

1. How do I get approved to operate SSO or SFSP during school closures in response to the novel coronavirus?

Seamless Summer Option

TDA recommends and encourages School Food Authorities (SFAs) to operate the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) during school closures in response to the novel coronavirus. On March 17, an email blast via TX-UNPS was sent to the following SFA Contracting Entities (CEs):

- CEs that participated in SSO last year
- CEs that did not participate in SSO or SFSP last year

The emailed guidance is also posted to the SSO Dashboard in TX-UNPS.

- Schools may get guidance on how fill out the application by emailing: NSLP-SBP.BOps@TexasAgriculture.gov
- SSO policy guidance may be found at: <http://squaremeals.org/Programs/SummerFeedingPrograms/SummerFeedingPolicyandHandbooks.aspx>

Summer Food Service Program

CEs may start meal service without an approved SFSP application. Follow these steps to get started:

- Create new sites for the disaster feeding.
 - Disaster feeding sites must start with **CV** and then **Site Name**
 - For example: CV Smith El.
- Complete the entire application and submit in TX-UNPS.

Please check the SFSP Dashboard in TX-UNPS as additional application guidance will be posted there.

- SFSP Policy guidance may be found at: <http://www.squaremeals.org/Programs/SummerFeedingPrograms/SummerFeedingPolicyandHandbooks.aspx>.

2. Are schools required to serve meals during an unanticipated school closure?

No. CEs are not required to serve meals during an unanticipated school closure. However, CEs are encouraged to develop plans and resources to ensure low-income families' needs are met during extended closures.

3. If the district has not historically operated a summer feeding program, may the district begin a program to serve meals during the COVID-19 outbreak?

SFA sponsors that do not currently operate a summer program are encouraged to operate under SSO during emergency school closures.

4. If a site is not area eligible, can meals still be served and claimed under SSO/SFSP?

If the site is not area eligible, schools may operate SSO or SFSP as a **closed enrolled site**. In a closed enrolled site, 50% of all students must be eligible to receive free and reduced meals in order to claim those meals. With this in mind, schools operating a closed enrolled site should establish an enrollment roster of students who meet that eligibility criteria in order to serve meals to those students for free. It is the responsibility of the school to confirm the eligibility of each participating child.

Any meals served to students not on that roster could be served, but the meals could not be claimed. To reduce non-reimbursable meal service at a closed enrolled site, TDA suggests sending correspondence to the families of the targeted children with guidance that only children from that household should show up to receive a meal. This approach also ensures that eligible households are not overtly identified.

Note that at each meal service, a meal count and a list of students served should be documented. Following each meal service, the meal count and student list should be validated to identify which "enrolled" students received meals and which students received a non-reimbursable meal.

For schools that plan home delivery of meals as part of a closed enrolled site, please refer to FAQs #11-16 below.

TDA encourages private nonprofits operating SFSP and using the non-congregate waiver to operate as an open site. At this time, TDA anticipates that only SFAs operating SSO or SFSP will be able to successfully operate as a closed enrolled site because they are better positioned to target low-income children qualifying for free or reduced priced meals without overtly identifying the households.

5. If our school is closed, where do I serve the meals?

CEs may determine the best distribution method to meet their community needs. Some possible suggestions include home delivery of meals, Grab-N-Go at select locations, curbside pick-up, mobile feeding, etc.

6. My school is closed because of the novel coronavirus. Do I have to serve meals in a group (congregate) setting?

USDA has allowed TDA to approve SSO and SFSP contracting entities (CEs) in good standing, to provide meals during an unanticipated school closure due to the novel coronavirus **in a non-congregate setting**. This waiver enables approved CE's to allow meals to be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, thereby allowing for social distancing. At this time, all other requirements for SSO and SFSP remain in place.

7. My school is closed because of the novel coronavirus. Am I allowed to operate SSO or SFSP at a school site?

Yes. USDA has allowed TDA to approve SSO and SFSP CEs, in good standing to provide meals during an unanticipated school closure due to the novel coronavirus **at both school and non-school sites**.

8. Are meal pattern requirements waived during school closures in response to COVID-19?

No. Meal pattern requirements have not been waived by USDA for the COVID-19 disaster declaration.

If non-congregate meals are being served, 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. Fluid shelf-stable milk may be used. USDA commodity foods may also be used. All health, sanitation, and safety standards must be followed.

Offer vs. Serve is **not** allowed.

If you are experiencing disruptions in your food supply, you will need to document your communications with your supplier/vendor, including information on the specific product(s) at issue, attempts to find supply, dates of contacts, and any other relevant information. Also, you will need to document the food item(s) served as a result of the supply disruption.

9. Who may receive a meal?

Children ages 18 years and younger and persons over 18 years of age who are determined by the State or local educational agency as having a mental or physical disability and who participate during the school year in a public or private non-profit school program established for the mentally or physically disabled may be served a meal.

Meals served to adults are not reimbursable by USDA; however, the cost of meals served free to adults working directly with the meal service at the site as either volunteers or paid employees is an allowable cost to the program.

CEs operating an open site must make meals available to all children on a first-come, first-serve basis. Attendance at the school is not required. Also, children are not required to show an identification to receive a meal.

10. May I provide a meal to a parent when the child is not present?

Not if the parent is picking up a meal from a designated site such as curbside or grab and go (see below for home deliveries). Regulations require that a child receive his or her meal.

11. Can schools that have been approved for non-congregate feeding through SSO or SFSP deliver meals directly to students' homes?

Yes. If the School Food Authority (SFA) determines there is a need and it is logistically feasible to deliver meals directly to homes, it may do so with TDA's approval and with adherence to all federal confidentiality requirements. Delivery could be completed by mail or delivery service, or

hand-delivered by school staff, volunteers, community organizations, or others. This option is only available to SFA sponsors of school sites due to student confidentiality and logistical requirements. Schools electing to deliver meals may serve only children who are in area eligible locations or who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, as discussed below in these FAQs. Schools must continue to establish the estimated number and types of meals to be served and the times of service (7 CFR 225.6(c)(2)(i)(B) and (c)(3)(i)(A)).

12. Who is eligible to receive home-delivered meals under SFSP and SSO?

CEs operating an **open SSO or SFSP site** in an area eligible location may deliver meals to all children within the eligible area.

Schools operating a **closed-enrolled site** may enroll children who are certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals and deliver meals only to the enrolled, eligible children. It is the responsibility of the school to confirm the eligibility of each participating child. All children attending Provision 2 or Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools are considered eligible for delivered meals.

13. What are the requirements for initiating home meal delivery for a household?

Schools must first obtain written consent from households of eligible children (this could include email or other electronic means) that the household wants to receive delivered meals. In addition, schools should confirm the household's current contact information and the number of eligible children in the household to ensure the correct number of meals are delivered to the correct location.

It is critical that schools protect the confidentiality of students and their households throughout this process. The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) do not authorize release of household contact information for children without first obtaining the written consent of the child's parent or guardian. The school must be the entity that makes the first contact about meal delivery with the households of eligible children, and must notify the household if contact information will be shared with an external organization (for example, a local non-profit that will provide meal delivery).

Once the school receives written consent from the parent or guardian to release contact information, the schools may share the information with other organizations involved with meal delivery. If the school is using a private vendor, then under the regulations implementing the NSLA, they must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the vendor concerning the confidentiality requirements. The MOU should include information such as what will be disclosed, how the information will be used, how the information will be protected from unauthorized uses and disclosures, and penalties for unauthorized disclosure. For further requirements, see 7 CFR 225.15(k)(1)-(2). The school must ensure data is handled appropriately at all times and by all organizations involved with meal delivery to safeguard household confidentiality.

14. Do home-delivered meals need to be shelf-stable?

No. The type of meal offered will depend on the resources and capacity of the CE or site. Those that are able to prepare ready-to-eat meals and have the capacity to deliver meals daily in a way that meets State or local food safety requirements may do so. Home-delivered meals must meet all meal pattern requirements of the SSO or SFSP.

15. If I am delivering meals to a child’s home, must the child be present at the delivery?

No. As long as the school has obtained the household’s written consent to deliver meals and has verified the current address, the student does not need to be present at the time of delivery. If the meals are shelf-stable, no one need be present, as long as the address has been verified. Please consider state and local food safety requirements and best practices.

16. If I deliver meals directly to children’s homes or distribute from a community site, are my transportation costs allowable expenses in SSO or SFSP?

Yes. Transportation costs related to delivery of meals is an allowable cost under these circumstances. CEs must continue to apply the cost principles in 2 CFR Part 200 (reasonable, necessary, and allocable). CEs must use the actual cost or a mileage rate (allowance) to account for allowable transportation costs.

Note that there is no additional reimbursement for home delivery or mobile meal delivery, but related expenses, such as postage and delivery service fees, would be considered allowable costs under the SSO or SFSP. Delivery costs could also be paid with non-program funds such as private donations.

17. Are documentation and recordkeeping requirements waived during school closures in response to COVID-19?

No. Documentation and recordkeeping requirements must be followed. Detailed recordkeeping is critical. If you need additional guidance, please refer to TDA’s summer meal guidance at <http://www.squaremeals.org/Programs/SummerFeedingPrograms.aspx>.

18. I am a School Food Authority and submitted a waiver for the Summer Mandate. Am I eligible to serve meals during an unanticipated school closure in response to the novel coronavirus?

Yes. If you are an SFA that submitted a waiver for the Summer Mandate, you may apply to serve meals in SSO or SFSP during school closures due to the novel coronavirus.

19. Do CEs need to use a point of service (POS) system for counting meals serviced under the COVID-19 waiver?

CEs must have an accurate method for counting and claiming meals. The method must ensure that only one meal for each meal type is claimed for each child each day. A CE may use its normal POS system, or a system developed specific to the circumstances. This includes a manual counting method.

20. Can I operate a mobile site?

Yes, the same guidance for operating a mobile site during regular summer operation applies in this situation.

21. In summary, what does meal service during a school closure look like?

As noted above, USDA has allowed TDA to approve SSO and SFSP CEs, in good standing, to provide meals during an unanticipated school closure due to the novel coronavirus at both school and non-school sites and in a non-congregate setting. This waiver enables approved CEs to allow meals to be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, thereby allowing for social distancing. At this time, all other requirements for SSO and SFSP remain in place.

Please keep in mind the following considerations about meal service under the current situation:

- The applicable SSO or SFSP meal pattern must be followed. USDA has not issued any meal pattern waivers.
- The meal may be hot, cold, or frozen.
- Boxes of nonperishable foods are not considered to be a reimbursable meal unless it meets the SSO or SFSP meal pattern, including milk. Fluid shelf-stable milk and USDA commodity foods may be used.
- All health, sanitation, and safety standards must be followed.
- Children ages 18 years and younger and persons over 18 years of age who are determined by the State or local educational agency as having a mental or physical disability and who participate during the school year in a public or private non-profit school program established for the mentally or physically disabled may be served a meal.
- Meals served to adults are not reimbursable by USDA; however, the cost of meals served free to adults working directly with the meal service at the site as either volunteers or paid employees is an allowable cost to the program.
- Providing a meal to a parent when the child is not present is not allowable except in cases of home delivery as discussed above in the FAQ.
- Documentation and recordkeeping requirements must be followed.
- Claims must be submitted monthly through TX-UNPS.

Please be sure to check the TDA website frequently as updated information is posted as it becomes available at <http://www.squaremeals.org/FandNResources/CoronavirusUpdateforContractingEntities.aspx>.

22. Is the process for requesting an Age/Grade waiver in SSO the same for COVID-19 sites?

TDA will be streamlining the process to request the SSO Age/Grade waiver as part of the application process for SSO. Additional guidance will be posted once it is available.

23. How do I do emergency procurement?

Emergency noncompetitive procurement requires TDA approval.

Submit requests in writing to TDA via email to Community.Ops@TexasAgriculture.gov. The email subject should include “Emergency Noncompetitive Procurement Request” and the name of the CE. For CEs that do not have access to email, please contact TDA at (877) TEX-MEAL.

In its written request, the CE must include the following information:

- Explanation of the circumstances that require an emergency purchase

- A detailed description of the products and/or services to be procured
- Supplier, distributor, or manufacturer from whom the product and/or services will be procured
- Period of time the CE plans to use the noncompetitive method for the emergency

TDA will provide written notification of approval or disapproval.