

# Tips and best practices for reaching families and serving meals during COVID-19

Thank you for the work you are doing to serve meals while schools are closed. While guidance is continuously changing, below are some tips and best practices to help you increase participation in your meal program during this time. Please reach out to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) and Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program with any questions.

## DISTRIBUTE MULTIPLE DAYS WORTH OF MEALS AT ONCE

SFAs/sponsors can identify a meal model that allows for up to two meals (or one meal and one snack, excluding lunch and supper) per child per day for multiple days, including weekends. Therefore, a child or family could pick up multiple meals for several days' worth of meal service. For example, distributing 2 days' worth of meals on Mondays and Wednesdays, and three days' worth of meals on Fridays to cover the weekend is allowable. This helps limit days of exposure for both your staff and for families picking up meals. Official guidance does not state a maximum number of days that can be distributed at once, but we recommend no more than 7 days due to food storage and safety concerns. Of course, perishability of meals will depend on the items that you are serving, and you should include information about proper food storage and expiration dates with your meals.

## PROVIDE WEEKEND MEALS FOR CHILDREN ON FRIDAYS.

Similar to above, [per DESE guidance](#) SFAs/sponsors may provide and receive reimbursement for weekend meals to children by serving multiple meals at a time. This is a great way to both serve more meals to children who need them and increase your total meals served and reimbursements. [Be sure to promote this](#) so that families are aware and have greater incentive to attend sites on Fridays.

## MAXIMIZE ACCESS TO MEALS THROUGH TRANSPORT AND DELIVERY

Utilize school busses, food service trucks or other vehicles available to you to offer meals along school bus routes, outside housing properties, and at other locations easily accessible to families who need meals. If you have the capacity and need to implement home-delivery of meals to some students, please reach out to DESE for guidance. School bus drivers and other district staff not currently working may be able to assist in this process. Request assistance from district administration in securing additional capacity as needed. Families must provide written consent for home delivered meals, and this documentation must be kept on file. For both home delivery and school bus delivery, you must have a food safety plan in place and DESE encourages SFAs/sponsors to work with their local Board of Health regarding the delivery plan.

## ALLOW PARENTS / CAREGIVERS TO PICK UP MEALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Per [official guidance](#), the USDA is allowing adults to pick up meals for children. Sites should have a process to verify that the adult picking up meals has children, and contact your DESE consultant to complete and submit a Bus Route Delivery Form. By allowing this option to families, you are also able to limit the number of individuals your staff and those picking up meals are exposed to each day.

## PROMOTE YOUR MEAL SITES THROUGH MANY DIFFERENT CHANNELS

Utilize school communication outlets such as robocalls, text messages, email newsletters, social media, and websites to promote your meal program. Enlist the support of district administrators, communications office, school principals, etc. to help you spread the word. Connect with local organizations / town officials / etc. who communicate regularly with families

or have well-known social media accounts. Many resources for promotion assistance are available at [meals4kids.org/COVID19](http://meals4kids.org/COVID19).

### **ENSURE YOUR MEAL SITES ARE LISTED ON STATEWIDE RESOURCES**

If your meals are not listed on [this map](#), or if you make changes to your meal sites timing or locations, please fill out [this brief form](#) so that those can be included in the map. Continue to update DESE on your meal sites as well.

### **ENCOURAGE THOSE ATTENDING MEAL SITES TO FILL OUT A SNAP APPLICATION**

Many of the families picking up meals at your sites may already be on SNAP and/or free/reduced eligible. However, many families' income has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and they may be newly-eligible due to a recent change in income. [Distribute this flyer](#) to families to let them know how they can apply for SNAP. Increasing SNAP enrollment in your community will have the added benefit of increasing your directly certified population and ISP.

### **ENSURE FAMILIES FEEL SAFE TO PARTICIPATE BY ADVERTISING YOUR PROTECTIVE MEASURES**

During this uncertain time, where everyone is encouraged to stay home, many will feel hesitant to come to a meal site. Help them by clearly advertising the steps you and your staff are taking to keep people and meals safe, and exactly what they can expect at sites. Offer pick up methods that ensure 6 ft of distance between all persons and minimize contact such as drive-thru/walk-thru meal pick up, or meal delivery. Carefully select distribution locations that are easy to find and spacious enough to avoid close contact, sanitize often, and utilize clear signage in multiple languages as meets the needs of your community. DESE recommends working with your local Board of Health on delivery plans and providing families with methods of meal storage or preparation instructions to help alleviate any food safety risks. Signage on health and safety [can be found here](#).

### **REMINDER FOR NON-AREA-ELIGIBLE SITES:**

USDA recently approved a waiver request to suspend area-eligibility requirements. Therefore all sites, including those that are not area-eligible, can operate as open sites and receive reimbursement for all meals served to children and teens. SFAs/sponsors need to contact DESE to enroll non-area eligible sites in either the Seamless Summer Option or SFSP. Sites do not need to track or identify free or reduced-price eligible students and must serve all children for free.

[Grants to assist with funding during this crisis can be found here.](#)

## **CONTACT US**

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