



# Operation Food Search

## COVID-19 Related School Closures Guidance for Child Nutrition

Schools may utilize the **Summer Seamless Option (SSO)** or **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** to serve meals to students during an unexpected school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To use this option, the school food authority or community organization must have an approved SSO or SFSP program agreement and application on file with the state.

### Program Operations Overview

Topic	Summer Seamless Option (SSO)	Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
<b>MO State Department Administration</b>	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)	Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)
<b>Program Sponsors</b>	School Food Authorities	Schools, community organizations, faith-based organizations, local government agencies
<b>Meal Cost to Children</b>	All meals are served at no cost to any child ages 18 and younger	All meals are served at no cost to any child ages 18 and younger
<b>Site Eligibility</b>	The site must be located in an area where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.	The site must be located in an area where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.
<b>Type of Meals</b>	Breakfast Lunch Snack	Breakfast Lunch Snack Supper
<b>Meal Pattern Requirements</b>	Meals must meet regular menu planning requirements for NSLP and SBP.	The meals must meet the regular <a href="#">menu planning requirements</a> for SFSP
<b>Maximum Number of Meals</b>	2 meals per day  May send a weeks' worth of food home with a child at one time (i.e. up to 10 meals)	2 meals per day  May send up to two days' worth of meals per day (i.e. on Monday serve breakfast and lunch for both Monday & Tuesday, 4 meals total).  <i>*Cannot serve lunch and supper on the same day</i>
<b>Meal Delivery Methods</b>	It is recommended that Grab & Go style meal delivery is used to encourage social distancing practices. Meals may be	It is recommended that Grab & Go style meal delivery is used to encourage social distancing practices. Meals may be delivered

Topic	Summer Seamless Option (SSO)	Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
	delivered via bus routes, drive throughs/pick-up lines.	via bus routes, drive throughs/pick-up lines.
<b>Application Process</b>	Sites with approved agreements to operate SSO in the prior two calendar years do not need to go through the approval process again but should complete the <a href="#">online form for SSO Schools</a> .	Sites with a current SFSP contract should complete the SFSP Application Addendum for Unanticipated School Closures and email to <a href="mailto:tanya.harvey@health.mo.gov">tanya.harvey@health.mo.gov</a>
<b>Contact Information</b>	DESE, Food & Nutrition Services: 573-751-3526	DHSS, Community Food & Nutrition Assistance: 888-435-1464

**Questions & Answers**

**What waivers have the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) received from USDA?**

- Congregate Feeding Requirement Waiver

The congregate feeding requirement for SFSP and SSO has been waived by the USDA. For the duration of the pandemic, students do *NOT* have to eat their meal on-site in order for the meal to be reimbursed.

- Meal Service During Unanticipated School Closures Waiver

A school *IS* allowed to serve meals through SSO or SFSP during school closures related COVID-19.

**How many meals may be provided to kids at one time?**

*Summer Seamless Option:*

- DESE has state authority regarding meal times and the number of meals each site may provide at one time.
- As usual, sites may provide up to two meals per day in any combination (breakfast, lunch, snack, supper) *except* a lunch and supper. Sites may send home a weeks’ worth of food to students (i.e. 5-10 meals at one time).
- Submit the number of meals you plan to provide to each child in your application to DESE.

*Summer Food Service Program:*

- At this time, DHSS has approved sites to distribute two days’ worth of meals per day. For example, On Monday a site may serve breakfast and lunch for both Monday and Tuesday, or distribute 4 meals at one time.

**If a child is sick, do they still have to be present in order to provide them a meal?**

When a child is sick, meals can be distributed to parents or family members. The family should notify the food service of the child’s illness and who will be responsible for the delivering meals.

## **How does a school or community organization apply to serve meals through SSO or SFSP during COVID-19 related school closures?**

Schools that have participated in a summer food program any time during the current year or in the prior two calendar years do not need to reapply to provide meals during unanticipated school closures due to COVID-19.

### *Summer Seamless Option:*

- Existing SSO schools should complete DESE's [online form for SSO Schools](#) and then can start serving meals.
- Schools who are new to SSO need to apply should contact DESE at 573-751-3526.

### *Summer Food Service Program:*

- Sites with a current SFSP contract should complete the SFSP Application Addendum for Unanticipated School Closures and email to [tanya.harvey@health.mo.gov](mailto:tanya.harvey@health.mo.gov).
- New sites to SFSP must complete the application process, [SFSP Site Information Sheet](#).

## **How can schools and community organizations determine if their site is eligible for SSO or SFSP?**

Meals can be served through SSO or SFSP in areas where at least 50% of children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. School or Census data can be used to determine eligibility. DESE will be issuing further guidance about how to use Census data for SSO.

The [USDA Area Eligibility Tool](#) is also available to assist with determining area eligibility.

## **Can meals be served in areas that do not meet the eligibility requirement (at least 50% of children qualify for free and reduced-price meals)?**

Not at this time. Both state agencies have contacted the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to request approval for eliminating the area eligibility requirement for SSO and SFSP.

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(H.R. 6201\)](#) was enacted on March 18, 2020, which would allow the USDA to waive the area eligibility requirement for SSO and SFSP. As of right now, the USDA has not yet approved any area eligibility waivers though.

## **Where can I find a list of sites in my community?**

If you're located in the St. Louis Region, Operation Food Search is updating a map regularly with all the sites in our region. Go to [www.operationfoodsearch.org](http://www.operationfoodsearch.org).

## **Does the Families First Act that was recently passed by Congress provide any additional flexibilities for SSO or SFSP?**

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(H.R. 6201\)](#) grants the USDA authority to issue nationwide school meal waivers during the COVID-19 emergency. These could include waiving the meal pattern requirements for SSO/SFSP if food supplies become limited and waiving the area eligibility requirement for SSO/SFSP sites. However, to date, neither of these waivers have been approved by the USDA.

## Outstanding Questions/Concerns

1. Right now, all sites must be located in areas where at least 50% of children are eligible for free or reduced-price (FRP) school meals. However, there are a lot of schools, particularly in St. Louis and St. Charles county, who have less than 50% FRP but know there is need among their students/families.
2. Typically, in both SSO and SFSP, milk is required to be served for every meal. However, food is in high demand and there is concern from schools and community organizations in their ability to obtain milk, especially shelf-stable milk.
3. [The Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(H.R. 6201\)](#) grants flexibilities to address the concerns listed in #1 and #2. The bill was enacted into law on March 18, 2020. States must apply to the USDA for waivers. So far, no states have been issued waivers to remove the rules outlined in #1 and #2.
4. DHSS indicated that they've reached out to the USDA to receive guidance on how many meals may be provided to a child at one time. In order to support social distancing, it would be best if at least a weeks' worth of meals could be provided. At this time though, the department is only approving sites to distribute two days' worth of food at one time (max of 4 meals).

For more information, please contact Operation Food Search's Department of Policy & Innovation:

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