

Food Safety Guidelines for Distributing Meals for Students' Consumption at Home

This guidance applies to sponsors of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) who implement the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) nationwide non-congregate feeding waiver, and distribute meals to students and parents or guardians for students' consumption at home.



Many of the foods contained in reimbursable meals provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs are perishable; they require time and temperature controls to maintain food safety. Examples include meat, poultry, fish, milk and other dairy products, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Sponsors who distribute meals for consumption at home must provide **instructions** to help students and parents/guardians identify which foods require refrigeration, freezing, cooking, or heating for food safety.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) encourages sponsors to contact their [local health department](#) for assistance with food safety guidance. Additional information and resources are available on the CSDE's [Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Strategies for Providing Food Safety Instructions

Sponsors may provide instructions for students and parents/guardians in a variety of ways. Examples of strategies include:

- labeling foods that require refrigeration or freezing;
- providing a list of foods that require refrigeration, freezing, and heating;
- sorting foods into two different bags prior to distribution, e.g., one for refrigerated and frozen foods and another for shelf-stable foods; and
- planning menus that use the more perishable foods earlier in the week and frozen or shelf stable foods later in the week.



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The CSDE encourages sponsors to remind parents/guardians to:

- refrigerate or freeze meals and milk immediately after pick-up or delivery;
- eat perishable foods (e.g., prepared chicken, cooked pasta, etc.) earlier in the week, and eat shelf-stable or frozen meals (e.g., nut butter, canned foods, and frozen foods) later in the week;
- reheat prepared foods, such as cooked chicken and cooked hamburger patties, to an internal temperature of at least 165 °F for at least 15 seconds;
- heat frozen foods according to provided instructions; and
- discard leftovers and open containers or packages of refrigerated food within three to four days.



Sponsors may also want to consider including simple food safety handouts or links to websites with relevant resources. For more information, refer to “[Resources](#)” in this document.

Examples of Food Safety Instructions

The charts below provide examples of food safety procedures and instructions. Sponsors should modify this information, as appropriate, to the specific types of foods in meals distributed for consumption at home.

Example 1: General food safety procedures

Meals are provided for children 18 years of age and younger. The USDA regulations allow for one breakfast and one lunch per child, per day.

Keep hot and cold foods safe

- Consume hot foods within two hours.
- Consume or refrigerate cold foods within two hours.
- Hot foods that will not be consumed immediately should be stored in the refrigerator or frozen. Reheat to an internal temperature of 165°F.
- Cook reheated foods to an internal temperature of 165°F.
- Discard all refrigerated foods within seven days after receiving.

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Example 2: General food safety procedures and preparation instructions

Meals are provided for children 18 years of age and younger. The USDA regulations allow for one breakfast and one lunch per child per day.

Keep hot and cold foods safe

- Keep cooked foods at 135°F or above until eaten.
- Refrigerate, freeze, or consume foods within two hours.
- Keep cold foods at 41°F or below
- Keep frozen foods at 0°F or below.
- Cook reheated foods to an internal temperature of 165°F.

Preparation instructions *

1. Round/French bread pizza – Conventional oven: Cook from frozen at 400°F for 20-24 minutes.
2. Corn dog – Conventional oven: Cook from frozen at 350°F for 34-36 minutes.
3. Chicken nuggets/patty – Conventional oven: Cook from frozen at 400°F for 12-15 minutes.
4. Breakfast Pizza – Conventional oven: Cook from frozen at 375°F for 18-22 minutes.

Note: Oven temperatures and times may vary. Oven use requires adult supervision.

* Modify these instructions, as appropriate, to reflect the specific foods provided in the meals for consumption at home.



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Example 3: General food safety procedures and preparation instructions

Meals are provided for children 18 years of age and younger. The USDA regulations allow for one breakfast and one lunch per child, per day.

Keep cold foods safe

- Refrigerate or consume within two hours of pickup.
- Keep cold foods refrigerated at 41°F or below.
- Keep milk refrigerated.
- Cook reheated foods to an internal temperature of 165°F.

Preparation instructions *

- Macaroni and cheese can be reheated in the microwave.
- Cheese pizza can be microwaved or heated in the oven.
- Chicken patty and nuggets are fully cooked. They can be microwaved, eaten cold, or heated in the oven.
- Deli sandwiches and breakfast items are ready to eat.

Note: Oven use requires adult supervision.

* Modify these instructions, as appropriate, to reflect the specific foods provided in the meals for consumption at home.

Resources

Food Safety Basics (USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service):

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics>

Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Food-Safety-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs>

Food Safety Tip Sheets (English and Spanish): Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill (FDA):

<https://www.fda.gov/food/health-educators/everyday-food-safety-resources-health-educators>

Keep Food Safe (FoodSafety.gov):

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe>

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Operation of Child Nutrition Programs during Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Outbreaks](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#), [summer meals staff](#), or [CACFP staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/Food_Safety_Guidelines_Distributing_Meals_for_Consumption_at_Home.pdf.

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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