Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Child Care Centers • Family Day Care Homes

Emergency Shelters • At-risk Afterschool Care Centers

Program Year 2026-27 (Effective June 8, 2026)

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About This Guide

The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* provides detailed guidance and resources to assist sponsors of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) with meeting the meal service requirements and guidance for children. The requirements in this guide apply to CACFP child care centers, at-risk afterschool care centers, emergency shelters, and family day care homes.

This guide is part of the CSDE's menu planning guidance series for CACFP child care programs (refer to "CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series" in this section).

> This guide reflects the USDA regulations and policies in effect as of the publication date. Please note that this information may change. The CSDE will update this guide whenever the USDA issues new CACFP guidance. For the most current version, please check the CSDE's "CSDE Menu Planning Guidance Series" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/guide_cacfp_meal_service.pdf.

Questions regarding this guide may be directed to Susan Fiore, MS, RD, Nutrition Education Coordinator, at 860-807-2075 or susan.fiore@ct.gov.

CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series

This guide is part of the CSDE's menu planning guidance series for the CACFP. These guides are designed to assist CACFP sponsors with meeting the CACFP meal patterns, including the requirements for crediting foods and beverages, menu documentation, and meal service. The applicable guides for CACFP child care programs are listed below.

- Guide to Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns for Children
- Guide to Meeting the Crediting Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (applies to the CACFP meal patterns for children and the CACFP adult meal patterns)
- Guide to Menu Documentation for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (applies to the CACFP meal patterns for children and the CACFP adult meal patterns)
- Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

The menu planning guidance series for the CACFP is available in the "CSDE Menu Planning Guidance Series" section

Contact Information for CSDE CACFP Staff

For questions regarding the CACFP, please contact the CACFP staff in the CSDE's Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs. For a list of all CSDE Child Nutrition Programs staff, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Child Nutrition Staff and Responsibilities*.

For links to federal and state requirements and guidance for the CACFP, visit the CSDE's Program Guidance for CACFP Adult Day Care Centers webpage or Program Guidance for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

APP	alternate protein product
AR	Administrative Review
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
C.G.S.	Connecticut General Statutes
CN	Child Nutrition
CSDE	Connecticut State Department of Education
FBG	Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA)
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FNA	Food and Nutrition Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture
FR	Federal Register
ICN	Institute of Child Nutrition
MMA	meats/meat alternates
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OVS	offer versus serve
oz eq	ounce equivalents
PFS	product formulation statement
RTE	ready to eat
SOP	standard operating procedure
TCS	Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

WGR	whole grain-rich
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children

For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Commonly Used Acronyms and Abbreviations in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*.

1 — Introduction

This guide assists CACFP child care programs with meeting the meal service requirements for children. These requirements apply to all CACFP facilities, including child care centers, at-risk afterschool care centers, emergency shelters, and family day care homes.

CACFP sponsors are eligible for USDA reimbursement when meals and snacks contain the minimum serving of each required meal component for each age group and meet all crediting requirements. In addition to meeting the CACFP meal patterns and crediting requirements, CACFP facilities must also comply with all applicable USDA regulations and policies for meal service to children.

Overview of CACFP Meal Patterns for Children

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) CACFP meal patterns for children are designed to meet children's calorie needs, provide key nutrients, and align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These meal patterns help children eat the types and amounts of foods that best support their growth and development.

The CACFP meal patterns for children require minimum servings of specific meal components for breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack for four different age groups: ages 1-2; ages 3-5; ages 6-12; and ages 13-18 (applies only to at-risk afterschool programs and emergency shelters).

Meal components and crediting requirements

A meal component is one of the five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. These meal components include milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates (MMA).

Each meal component has specific crediting requirements. All foods and beverages must meet these requirements to credit as a meal component of reimbursable meals and snacks. This includes commercial products, foods made from scratch by the CACFP facility, and foods prepared by vendors.

For detailed guidance on the meal pattern requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns for Children* and visit the "CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

For information on the crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Crediting Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Overview of Meal Service Requirements

Federal and state regulations and policies address meal service for children in the CACFP. This includes requirements or guidance for meal schedules, types of meal service, point-of service meal and snack counts, children's intent to participate in the meal service, meals consumed off site (including field trip meals and taking meal components offsite in at-risk afterschool centers), offer versus serve (OVS) for at-risk afterschool centers, prohibition of gender separation, water availability during the meal and snack service, and family-provided foods for medical or special dietary needs.

Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts

CACFP facilities must record all counts for reimbursable meals and snacks at the point of service. This is the moment in the meal service where staff can accurately determine that the child has been served all required meal components for a reimbursable meal or snack.

- For cafeteria-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal counts after all required meal components of the reimbursable meal have been offered to the child. This is typically at the end of the serving line (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service" in section 3).

- For pre-plated meal service (included bagged meals/snacks), staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts when the child receives the meal/snack (refer to "Point-of-service counts for pre-plated meal service" in section 3).

- For family-style meal service and combination-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal or snack service (refer to "Monitoring point-of-service meal/snack counts" and "Point-of-service counts for combination-style meal service" in section 3).

Meal/snack counts cannot be taken before or after the meal or snack service. The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine meal/snack counts, such as children's attendance, orders for meals/snacks, and the number of meals/snacks sent to or returned from satellite locations. Meal/snack counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the CACFP requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals and snacks.

Children's Intent to Participate in the Meal Service

For CACFP facilities to claim reimbursement for CACFP meals and snacks, children must participate in the meal or snack service or have the intent to participate in the meal or snack service. A child who makes no attempt (i.e., has no intent) to join other children at the meal or snack cannot be included in the reimbursable meal or snack count, even if they were asked by the supervising adult to participate.

The USDA regulations allow for reimbursement of meals and snacks that are served to and eaten by children. They do not allow for reimbursement of ordered or plated meals or snacks. It may be difficult to judge the child's intent to participate in the meal or snack service when CACFP facilities use pre-plated meals/snacks or supervising adults serve the children.

> If a child refuses a meal that is pre-plated or served by a staff member, the CACFP facility cannot claim the meal or snack for reimbursement. The child must show intent to eat, such as coming willingly to the table, helping themself to food or asking to be served, and attempting to eat the meal or snack. The child does not have to eat the meal or snack for the CACFP facility to claim reimbursement, but the child must demonstrate the intent to eat.

When a child who clearly has no intent to participate in the meal or snack service is forced to come to the table or put food on their plate, the CACFP facility cannot claim the meal or snack for reimbursement. This policy ensures that mealtimes provide positive experiences around food and help children develop a healthy, balanced approach to eating.

There are various reasons that children might not have the intent to participate in the meal or snack service. A child could have behavioral issues or be feeling unwell, which can diminish their appetite or interest in food. Emotions such as tiredness, anger, or frustration can also play a significant role in a child's willingness to participate in a meal or snack.

Examples of intent to participate in the meal service

The examples below illustrate the principle of a child's intent to eat, and when CACFP facilities can claim reimbursement for meals and snacks.

- **Example 1:** A child typically chooses not to participate in the meal or snack service. A teacher forces the child to come and sit at the table and serves the child some food. The child does not eat. Can the CACFP facility claim the meal?

  No. The child has not chosen (i.e., has no intent) to participate in the meal. Since the teacher knows this child typically does not eat, it would be clear that the child did not intend to participate in the meal or snack.

  If the child willingly comes to the table, chooses to take a serving of food, but then does not eat, the meal or snack is reimbursable. In this case, the child has the intent to eat, even if they did not follow through.

- **Example 2:** A child who normally participates in the meal service comes to the table then chooses not to take any food. Can the CACFP facility claim the meal?

  No. The child has chosen not to participate.

- **Example 3:** At snack time, a child is crying and upset over an altercation with another child. The teacher asks her to come to the table, but she refuses. Can the CACFP facility claim the meal?

  No. The child has chosen not to participate.

- **Example 4:** A child willingly comes to the table at mealtime. He helps himself to several meal components, takes one bite, and then stops eating because he does not feel well. Can the CACFP facility claim the meal?

  Yes. The child chose to participate and had the intent to eat, even though he changed his mind when he did not feel well.

- **Example 5:** A child gets sick just before lunch. She is lying on a cot, waiting for her parent to pick her up. Can the CACFP facility claim the meal?

  No. The child does not have the intent to participate in the meal.

Guidance on Meeting the Meal Service Requirements

The resources below provide CACFP facilities with information and guidance on meeting the meal pattern and meal service requirements for the CACFP.

- Links to the USDA's regulations and final rules for the CACFP meal patterns are available on the CSDE's Laws and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.
- The USDA provides guidance for implementing the CACFP through the policy memos on their Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Documents & Resources webpage.
- The CSDE's Operational Memoranda for the CACFP webpage provides links to relevant USDA memos by year and includes memos from the CSDE Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs on the requirements for the CACFP.
- The CSDE's Program Guidance for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage provides an alphabetical listing of links to information and guidance on the federal and state requirements for the CACFP, including the meal patterns, crediting foods and beverages, menu documentation, and meal service.
- The CSDE's CACFP Updates e-newsletter provides important guidance and resources to help CACFP facilities comply with the federal and state requirements, and identifies deadlines for completing required activities.
- The CSDE's Training for Child Nutrition Programs webpage provides links to recorded trainings on a variety of topics.
- The CSDE's Manuals and Guides for Child Nutrition Programs webpage provides links to guides on a variety of topics, including food safety, menu planning and meal patterns, program administration, and special diets.

CACFP facilities may contact the CSDE's CACFP staff for more information and program-specific questions.

2 — Meal Schedules

The USDA regulations for the CACFP do not address specific requirements for the timing or length of meal service. However, the CSDE encourages CACFP facilities to schedule meal services to ensure good nutrition practices, minimize food waste, and provide sufficient time for children to eat.

Guidelines for Scheduling Meals and Snacks

CACFP facilities should consider the appropriate timing and scheduling for meals and snacks to effectively meet children's nutritional needs and promote a healthy eating environment. CACFP staff should collaborate with their administrators to establish optimal meal and snack schedules. The CSDE recommends following the guidelines below when planning meals and snacks for children.

Provide consistent mealtimes

Consistent meal and snack times are essential for creating a predictable routine that meets children's nutritional needs and supports their overall development. A regular schedule fosters a sense of security and encourages good eating habits. It also promotes social interactions, allowing children to engage with peers and practice communication skills. Additionally, maintaining regular mealtimes helps regulate children's energy levels and moods, reducing irritability and fatigue, which leads to more focused activities.

Space eating intervals appropriately

CACFP facilities should schedule meal and snack periods at appropriate times that are not too close together or too far apart. When the time span is too short, children may not be hungry enough to eat. When the time span is too long, children may experience hunger symptoms (such as fatigue, irritability, inability to concentrate, weakness, and stomach pains) that can significantly disrupt their daily activities and learning.

Snacks should be served at times that allow children to come to their regular meals hungry but not famished. The CSDE recommends at least two hours between the beginning of a meal service and the beginning of a snack service. For example, schedule at least two hours between the beginning of breakfast and the beginning of a morning snack, and schedule at least two hours between the beginning of lunch and the beginning of an afternoon snack.

> At-risk afterschool centers that serve supper and snack must comply with specific state-defined intervals between these meal services (refer to "CSDE requirement for meal intervals" in this section).

Generally, most children need to eat within three to four hours of their last meal. Younger children have small stomachs and high energy needs and need to eat more frequently. The recommendations below can assist CACFP facilities with scheduling meal and snack times.

- **Toddlers and preschoolers**: Offer meals and snacks at least two hours apart but not more than three hours apart. This frequency supports young children's rapid growth and development, ensuring they receive the necessary nutrients without becoming overly hungry.
- **School-age children:** Offer meals and snacks about every three to four hours. This interval aligns with school-age children's increased activity levels and helps maintain focus during school and other activities.

These general guidelines help children maintain consistent energy levels while minimizing excessive hunger or overeating.

Adjust meal and snack schedules as needed

CACFP facilities may need to adjust their meal and snack schedules based on children's needs. Factors such as individual hunger cues, activity levels, and developmental stages may necessitate changes to meal and snack schedules.

Staff should pay attention to children's behavior and hunger signs (such as increased restlessness, difficulty concentrating, or asking for food) to make informed decisions about adjusting meal and snack times. For example, if a group of children appears particularly hungry before a scheduled snack time, offering an earlier snack can prevent frustration and help them refocus on activities. By adopting a flexible approach to scheduling, CACFP facilities can provide a supportive environment that helps children develop healthy eating habits.

Schedule mealtimes after structured physical activity or active play

Scheduling mealtimes after structured physical activity or active play is an effective strategy to increase meal consumption, promote better behavior, and encourage a more positive mealtime environment. Children who play before they eat have improved behavior at mealtimes and in the classroom. They are less likely to be distracted or fidgety, leading to more pleasant dining experiences and improved social interactions with peers.

Engaging in physical activity stimulates children's appetites, making them more likely to enjoy their meal, try new foods, and finish their portions. They waste less food and drink more milk, which leads to increased nutrient intake.

In addition to promoting better eating habits, scheduling meals after active play can positively influence children's behavior and create a calmer, more focused environment at the table. This improves the mealtime atmosphere and helps children be more settled and ready to learn upon returning to classroom activities.

Allow Sufficient Time to Eat

The CACFP regulations do not require a specific amount of time for children to eat meals and snacks. However, allowing sufficient time for all children to eat and socialize during mealtimes is essential for fostering healthy eating habits. Allowing sufficient time at the table encourages conversations, helps children learn to share and take turns, and promotes positive mealtime behaviors.

Scheduled mealtimes should allow for at least 20 minutes to eat breakfast or snack and at least 30 minutes to eat lunch or supper, after all children are seated at the table. This allows children to consume their meals without feeling rushed and fosters social interactions that are vital for children's emotional and social development.

Individual eating paces can vary greatly, and some children may require more time to finish their meals. CACFP facilities should adjust these timeframes as needed to ensure that all children have enough time to eat until they are no longer hungry.

State Lunch Period Requirement for Child Care Programs in Public Schools

Child care programs that operate in public schools must comply with the state requirement for a minimum daily lunch period. Section 10-221o of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) requires that all public schools must provide a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for full-day students.

This 20-minute lunch period is not required on half days or early dismissal days since school is not operating a full day. C.G.S. Section 10-221o applies only to full-day students. It does not apply to half-day students, such as preschoolers in a half-day program.

> A 20-minute lunch period may not be sufficient for younger children. Individual eating paces can vary greatly for young children, and some children may require more time to finish their meals (refer to "Allow Sufficient Time to Eat" in this section).

For more information, refer to the CSDE's Circular Letter C-9: *Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students* and *CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*.

3 — Types of Meal Service

CACFP facilities may use any type of meal service that is appropriate to the individual needs and logistics of each child care program. Allowable types of meal service include pre-plated, cafeteria style, family style, and combination style.

Pre-plated meal service

With pre-plated meal service, staff pre-plate the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the meal pattern requirements for each age group. For example, staff prepare each child's plate for lunch with the minimum serving of MMA, grains, vegetables, and fruits, and portion each child's cup with the minimum serving of milk. The requirements and guidance for pre-plated meal service are summarized below.

- The meal or snack must provide the minimum portion size of all required meal components at the same time (refer to "Overview of CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" in section 1).

- Staff prepare plates and cups before children are seated.

- Staff use appropriate serving utensils (e.g., scoops (dishers), spoodles, and serving spoons) to measure out the required portion for each age group. For more information, visit the "Portion Control" section of the CSDE's Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

- CACFP facilities provide staff with appropriate training and guidance to ensure portions meet the minimum requirements. The CSDE's Bite Size: Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns training program provides detailed guidance on the CACFP meal patterns. Examples of training resources include the CACFP meal patterns (refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns for Children* and visit the "CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage), crediting guidance (refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Crediting Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage), and completed menu forms, production records, and recipes (refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Menu Documentation for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the "Menu Forms and Production Records" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage). For more resources, refer to section 9.

Additional guidance on the CACFP meal patterns is available on the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Point-of-service meal counts for pre-plated meal service

Assigned staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts when the child receives all required meal components (refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1). This also applies to bagged meals/snacks handed out to children during the meal or snack service.

Cafeteria-style Meal Service

Cafeteria-style meal service is common in school settings. Children go through the cafeteria serving line and food service staff serve each child the required meal components of their meal. Children may also self-serve some foods, such as selecting a carton of milk or a piece of fresh fruit. Some young children may require assistance from a supervising adult to safely carry their tray to a cafeteria table.

Point-of-service meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service

Staff must take meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service at the point of service (refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1). The point-of-service is typically at the end of the serving line, after all meal components of a reimbursable meal have been offered to the child.

Family-style Meal Service

Family-style meal service allows children to serve themselves from communal platters or bowls of food with assistance, if needed, from supervising adults who sit with the children. This approach allows children to identify and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus, while developing a positive attitude toward healthy foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits. Family-style meal service also helps young children develop motor skills and the dexterity and hand strength needed to serve foods.

With family-style meal service, the minimum serving size of each meal component must be offered to each child over the course of the meal. Unlike pre-plated meal service or cafeteria-style meal service, family-style meals allow some flexibility in the initial serving sizes because additional servings of each food are readily available at each table, and more can be served at any time.

The USDA recommends using family-style meal service for ages 3-5. When a complete family-style service is not feasible, it can be beneficial to offer certain meal components family style, especially for younger children or when introducing a new food item. For more information, refer to "Combination-style meal service" in this section.

CACFP facilities that implement family-style meal service must follow the guidelines below to ensure compliance and eligibility for reimbursement. For detailed guidance, refer to the USDA's guide, *Family Style Meal Service with Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, and "Resources for family-style meal service" in this section.

Communicating with children and families

CACFP facilities should explain the procedures and rules for family-style meal service to children and provide opportunities for them to practice. The USDA's guide, *Family Style Meal Service with Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, provides guidance on helping children learn to use family-style meal service. The USDA's posters, Let's Eat "Family Style" and Let's Talk at Mealtime, provide guidance that can be posted in the classroom.

It is also important to communicate information about the benefits of family-style meal service to parents/guardians and how it encourages healthy eating habits and social interactions among children. CACFP facilities can also include guidance on incorporating similar practices at home to further support children's health and learning (refer to the USDA's handout, *Serving Meals "Family Style"*). This might include suggestions for offering a variety of foods, encouraging self-serving, and engaging in mealtime conversations, all of which contribute to a positive eating environment.

Communal serving dishes and utensils

The meal components must be served in communal bowls or dishes that are placed on the table before children are seated. Use appropriately sized unbreakable bowls, dishes, and serving utensils (such as tongs or spoons) for children to serve themselves.

Serve milk in child-sized pitchers. If different age groups are served at a meal, use a different color pitcher and cup for each age group. For example, use a red pitcher and red cups to serve whole milk to age 1 and a blue pitcher and blue cups to serve low-fat milk to ages 2-5.

Offering the minimum portions

The communal serving dishes must contain the full serving (minimum meal pattern amount) of each meal component for all children at the table. The milk pitcher must contain the full serving of the appropriate type of milk for each age group. The examples below illustrate these requirements for ages 3-5.

- **Example 1:** The lunch menu provides the required ¼-cup serving of the fruits component for ages 3-5 from ¼ cup of sliced apples. If four children sit at the table, the communal serving plate or bowl must contain at least 1 cup of apple slices.

- **Example 2:** The breakfast and lunch meal patterns for ages 3-5 require ¾ cup of unflavored milk. If four children sit at the table, the milk pitcher must contain at least 3 cups of milk or that amount must be readily available nearby. If the required amount of milk makes the pitcher too heavy for young children, the pitcher can initially contain less milk if the remaining required quantity is readily available nearby.

If supervising adults eat with the children, the prepared amounts of food and milk must include the additional amounts for adult meals. The expense of extra creditable food produced for meals for supervising adults during family-style meal service is an allowable cost for the CACFP.

For guidance on how to calculate the required amount of food for each age group, refer to the USDA's guide, *Family Style Meal Service with Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Offering the required meal components

Family-style meal service allows children to make choices in selecting foods and the serving size. Supervising adults should initially offer all children the full serving of each meal component. Children may select an initial amount that is less than the full serving

Supervising adults should encourage children to take additional portions and selections to meet the full serving, as appropriate. However, children are not required to self-serve or consume the full serving.

> CACFP facilities may still claim the meal or snack for reimbursement if a child refuses a meal component or takes a smaller amount of a meal component.

Second meals and servings

During family-style meal service, children may select additional servings beyond the minimum quantity required in the CACFP meal patterns. However, CACFP facilities cannot claim additional reimbursement for second meals and larger servings.

Role of supervising adults

During the service of the meal or snack, supervising adults are responsible for actively encouraging each child to accept the full serving of each meal component. For example, if a child initially refuses a meal component or does not accept the full serving, the supervising adult should offer the meal component to the child again.

Role modeling

The CSDE strongly encourages supervising adults to eat with the children and assist with serving as needed. Role modeling at mealtimes is an important component of family-style meal service and assists in the development of healthy eating practices.

> Meals and snacks that follow the guidelines for family-style meal service are reimbursable, even if supervising adults do not eat with the children.

Monitoring point-of-service meal/snack counts

Supervising adults must be present and monitor the entire process at each table to ensure that children take a reimbursable meal or snack. Supervising adults must follow the proper procedures for counting reimbursable meals and snacks at the point of service. Point-of-service meal/snack counts must be recorded while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal or snack service (refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1).

> Point-of-service meal/snack counts must be recorded by trained supervising adults who are familiar with the CACFP meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals and snacks.

Staff training

CACFP facilities must ensure that supervising adults are trained on the requirements and proper procedures for implementing family-style meal service. For training slides and other materials, visit the USDA's Family Style Meal Service with Children in the CACFP webpage.

Accommodating special dietary needs during family-style meal service

CACFP facilities must modify meals as appropriate for children whose disability restricts their diet. The USDA also encourages CACFP facilities to make optional modifications for non-disability reasons, such as requests related to religious or moral convictions, general health concerns, and personal food preferences.

To accommodate modified meals during family-style meal service, CACFP facilities may pre-plate food substitutions on the child's plate. The remaining meal components may be passed around "family style."

> If a child's dietary restriction requires avoidance of specific foods (such as food allergies or gluten intolerance), CACFP facilities must consider the risk of cross-contact during meal service from serving utensils. It may be safer to pre-plate the child's full meal to ensure that cross-contact does not occur.

The requirements for meal modifications are summarized in the CSDE's resource, *Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications for Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. For detailed guidance, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs*

in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and visit the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Resources for family-style meal service

The resources below provide guidance on implementing family-style meal service in the CACFP.

- CACFP Trainers' Circle: Family Style Meal Service with Children in the CACFP (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/cacfp/trainers-circle-webinars/family-style-meal-service
- Family Style Meal Service ("Meal Service" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/meal-service#FamilyStyle
- Family Style Meal Service with Children in the CACFP Posters (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/cacfp-family-style-meals-posters
- Family Style Meal Service With Children in the CACFP Training Materials (USDA webpage): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/family-style-meal-service-cacfp
- Family Style Meal Service With Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (USDA): https://fna-bwbufwdzbabpezgc.z01.azurefd.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/CACFP-Family-Style-Meal-ServiceOperator-Booklet.pdf
- Grab and Go Lesson: CACFP and Family Style Meal Service (Institute of Child Nutrition): https://theicn.org/wpfd_file/cacfp-and-family-style-meal-service/
- Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/child-care-organization/nibbles
- Serving Meals "Family Style" (USDA Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children): https://www.fna.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/nibbles_familymeals_eng.pdf

- USDA Memo CACFP 02-2025: Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meals in CACFP: https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cacfp/offer-versus-serve-family-style-meals

For additional resources, visit the "Meal Service" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Combination-style Meal Service

Combination-style meal service combines pre-plated meal service and family-style meal service. Some foods in the meal are pre-plated while others are served family style. Combination-style meal service is a good option when a meal contains foods that cannot be easily or safely passed in common serving dishes from one child to another. Some examples include heavy or hot foods and liquids like soup, juice, and milk. The example below shows how a child care program could implement combination-style meal service for a CACFP meal.

- **Example:** The CACFP lunch menu includes a turkey sandwich, vegetable soup, garden salad, diced peaches, and milk. The vegetable soup and milk are pre-plated and the turkey sandwich, garden salad, and diced peaches are served family style. The supervising adult portions the minimum required amount of vegetable soup into each child's bowl and the minimum required amount of milk into each child's cup. The turkey sandwich, garden salad, and diced peaches are offered in common serving dishes that are passed around the table so children may serve themselves.

CACFP facilities that use combination-style meal service must ensure that staff meet the requirements for both types of meal service (family style and pre-plated). For all pre-plated foods, the quantities placed on plates and in cups by the supervising adult must meet the minimum serving size for each age group. For all family-style foods, the quantities available in the common serving dishes provided by the food service staff must provide the minimum serving size for each child seated at the table and if applicable, all supervising adults that eat with the children.

Point-of-service meal counts for combination-style meal service

Meal counts for combination-style meal service must follow the same requirements for family-style meal service (refer to "Monitoring point-of-service meal/snack counts" in this section. Supervising adults must complete point-of-service meal counts while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal service (refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1).

4 — At-risk Afterschool Care Centers

Federal and state regulations and policies address some specific meal service requirements for at-risk afterschool care centers that differ from other CACFP facilities. This section covers meal service times, meal intervals, field trips, and offer versus serve (OVS).

Meal Service Times

The CACFP regulations that address meal service in at-risk afterschool care centers do not specify a mandated time limit between the end of school and service of the meal or snack. However, when school is in session, meals and snacks must be served after the child's school day. Meals and snacks served on weekends or holidays may be served at any time of day with CSDE approval.

- **Snacks:** Section 7 CFR 226.17a(m)(1) of the CACFP regulations indicates that the snack must be served after the child's school day when school is in session. With state agency approval, the snack may be served at any time on weekends and vacations during the regular school year.

- **Meals:** Section 7 CFR 226.17a(m)(2) of the CACFP regulations indicates that meals must be served after child's school day when school is in session. With state agency approval, any one meal may be served (breakfast, lunch, or supper) per day on weekends and vacations during the regular school year.

For additional information, refer to USDA Memo CACFP 08-2012: *The At-Risk Afterschool Meals Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Questions and Answers*.

CSDE Requirement for Meal Intervals

The supper meal can be served at any point during the afterschool program. While it is called "supper" when served after school, program staff can determine the best time to serve the meal. Supper can be served right when children walk through the door. At-risk snacks and at-risk suppers must be served after the end of the school day.

If the snack is served first, the CSDE requires that at least two hours must elapse between the snack and a supper meal. Two and a half hours must elapse between meal services when the supper meal is served before the snack.

Requirement to Notify CSDE Prior to Field Trip Meals

As indicated in USDA Memo CACFP 10-2017: *Taking Food Components Offsite in the At-Risk Afterschool Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, at-risk afterschool care centers must notify the CSDE prior to providing meals during field trips. Field trip meals must also meet all other requirements (refer to "When Field Trip Meals are Allowed" in section 5).

Offer versus serve (OVS) for At-risk Afterschool Programs

OVS is an optional approach to menu planning and meal service in the CACFP that may be implemented at supper in CACFP at-risk afterschool programs. OVS allows children to decline some of the offered foods in CACFP meals and select the foods they prefer to eat. The purpose of OVS is to simplify program administration and reduce food waste and costs while maintaining the nutritional integrity of CACFP meals.

> Prior to implementing OVS, at-risk afterschool programs that choose to implement OVS must notify the CSDE by emailing their assigned CSDE CACFP staff member. The CSDE must approve the OVS request before OVS implementation can begin.

The requirements for implementing OVS are defined in section 7 CFR 226.20(o) of the USDA's regulations for the CACFP. The USDA provides guidance with questions and answers on the CACFP OVS requirements in USDA Memo CACFP 02-2025: *Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Overview of OVS requirements for supper

There are two requirements for reimbursable suppers with OVS. One requirement applies to menu planning and the meals offered by the at-risk afterschool program and the other requirement applies to the foods selected by the child.

- **Menu planning:** To implement OVS in at-risk afterschool programs, the CACFP supper menu must offer the full serving of the five meal components required by the CACFP supper meal pattern. The serving for each meal component must be at least the minimum required quantities in the CACFP supper meal pattern for children (refer to "Overview of CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" in section 1).

- **Children's food selections:** Children must select the full serving of at least three meal components for a reimbursable meal. They may decline any two meal components but must be allowed to choose all offered meal components.

Suppers that meet these requirements are eligible for reimbursement in the CACFP.

OVS resources

The CSDE's *Guide to Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in At-risk Afterschool Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* provides detailed guidance on OVS. Additional resources are available in the "Offer versus Serve (OVS) for At-risk Afterschool Programs" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Training on OVS is available in Module 18: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in At-risk Afterschool Programs of the CSDE's training program, Bite Size: Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns.

5 — Field Trip Meals

Generally, meals and snacks are not allowed offsite because the CACFP is a congregate feeding program intended to provide meals and snacks that are served to and consumed by children in a supervised group setting on the premises of the CACFP facility. However, field trip meals are allowed if they meet certain requirements.

Requirements for Congregate Meals and Snacks in the CACFP

The CACFP is a congregate feeding program. The USDA provides reimbursement only for congregate meals and snacks that are served to and consumed by children in a supervised group setting on the premises of the CACFP facility. Meals and snacks given to children to take home are not reimbursable because children who have left the premises are no longer participating in the activities of the child care program.

> If an enrolled child leaves the meal service early, uneaten meal or snack components cannot be packed "to go." By leaving the CACFP facility and consuming the food off premises, the child is not participating in the meal or snack service with the rest of the group. CACFP facilities cannot claim these meals and snacks for reimbursement.

When Field Trip Meals are Allowed

Field trips are an allowable exception to the congregate meals requirement if the CACFP facility meets specific requirements. To be reimbursable, meals served on field trips must:

- meet the CACFP meal patterns for children (refer to "Meal Pattern Requirements for Field Trips" in this section);
- be served and consumed as part of a program-related function;
- follow the appropriate procedures for point-of-service meal counts (refer to "Point-of-service Meal Counts for Field Trips" in this section); and
- meet all food safety requirements (refer to "Food Safety for Field Trips" in this section).

Additional requirements for prior notification of field trips apply to at-risk afterschool care centers and family day care home providers. At-risk afterschool care centers must provide notice to the CSDE prior to the field trip (refer to "Requirement to notify CSDE prior to field trip meals" in

section 4). Family day care home providers must tell their sponsoring agency in advance when planning to be away from home with the children during the meal service period.

Meal Pattern Requirements for Field Trips

To be reimbursable, field trip meals must meet the same requirements as meals served in the CACFP facility. They must include the minimum quantities of the required meal components for each meal or snack (refer to "Overview of CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" in section 1).

Must offer fluid milk

CACFP facilities must offer the appropriate type of fluid milk for each age group with all field trip meals. Juice, water, or any other beverages cannot substitute for fluid milk on field trips.

CACFP facilities might consider using aseptically packaged milk for field trips. Unopened aseptically packaged milk is safe to consume at room temperature but should be kept cold so it is acceptable to children. Milk tastes best when served at 35°F.

Meal modifications for disability reasons

CACFP facilities must modify field trip meals as appropriate for children whose disability restricts their diet (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications for Children the Child and Adult Care Food Program*). For detailed guidance on the meal modification requirements for disability reasons, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Point-of-service Meal Counts for Field Trips

Staff supervising the field trip must follow the appropriate procedures for point-of-service meal counts (refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1). For field trips, the point of service is the moment in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that the child has been served all required meal components for a reimbursable meal.

The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine field trip meal counts, such as field trip attendance, orders for field trip meals, the number of meals sent on the field trip, or the number of meals returned from the field trip. Meal counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the CACFP requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals.

CACFP facilities must develop a local process to ensure that staff take accurate point-of-service meal counts for field trips. The CSDE recommends developing a standard operating procedure (SOP) for field trips that includes meal count procedures (refer to 'Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals " in this section).

Food Safety for Field Trips

CACFP facilities must ensure that field trip meals follow appropriate food safety procedures. The greatest food safety concern is ensuring that foods defined by the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Code as "Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food" (TCS) stay at proper temperatures during transport and service.

Implementing the practices below helps CACFP facilities ensure the safety of field trip meals. The CSDE recommends including food safety procedures in the CACFP facility's SOP for field trip meals (refer to 'Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals" in this section).

Meal preparation

- **Follow HACCP procedures:** Ensure that staff follow all applicable Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures during the preparation and storage of field trip meals. For HACCP guidance, refer to the "HACCP" section of the CSDE's Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

- **Chill TCS:** Chill TCS that will be served cold before placing in transport containers. Examples include sandwiches (e.g., turkey, ham, roast beef, tuna salad); cut fresh fruit and vegetables, especially melons, tomatoes, and leafy greens (excluding whole fruit and pre-packaged, shelf-stable fruit such as fruit cups and applesauce); and dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese.

- **Keep milk cold:** If the transport containers cannot maintain milk at 41°F or below, use shelf-stable (aseptic) milk that does not require refrigeration (refer to "Must offer fluid milk" in this section). CACFP facilities might consider using aseptically packaged milk for field trips. Unopened aseptically packaged milk is safe to consume at room temperature but should be kept cold so it is acceptable to children. Milk tastes best when served at 35°F.

Meal transport

- **Maintain appropriate temperatures:** Maintain TCS at appropriate temperatures during transport and storage. Cold foods must be kept at 41°F or below. Hot foods must be kept at 135°F or above. For more information, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) sample SOP, *Hot and Cold Holding for Time Temperature Control for Safe Foods*.

- **Use appropriate food transport containers:** Transport TCS in insulated portable food transport containers like coolers. Clean and sanitize transport containers before use. Use ice or cold packs to maintain the temperature of TCS. Keep the containers tightly closed until meals are distributed. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, *Transporting Food to Remote Sites (Satellite Kitchens)*.

- **Store containers appropriately:** Store transport containers and foods out of direct sunlight and away from engines.

Meal service

- **Serve meals at appropriate times:** Ensure that children eat meals at the appropriate time for correct implementation of time and temperature controls for food safety. Cold foods must be kept at 41°F or below; or eaten within four hours if stored below 70°F; or eaten within one hour if kept at temperatures above 90°F.

- **Require handwashing for staff:** Ensure that staff wash hands prior to distributing meals. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is not a suitable substitute for handwashing because it is not effective against foodborne viruses and allergens. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, Washing Hands.

- **Use gloves and serving utensils:** Use clean disposable gloves or utensils when distributing any unwrapped or unpackaged ready-to-serve food, such as whole pieces of fresh fruit or sandwiches packaged in bulk containers. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, *Using Suitable Utensils When Handling Ready-to-Eat Foods*.

- **Require children to wash hands before eating:** Have children thoroughly wash their hands before receiving meals and eating. To avoid potential allergic reactions, ask children not to share foods.

- **Discard leftovers:** Discard all leftover food items returned in coolers from the field trip.

Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals

The CSDE encourages CACFP facilities to develop a SOP with clear written procedures for field trip meals, including how to identify reimbursable meals, instructions for conducting point-of-service meal counts, food safety requirements, and a plan for informing substitutes and volunteers of the requirements for field trip meals.

For an example of a field trip SOP, refer to the Iowa State University's *Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals*. For more examples of SOPs, refer to the CSDE's *Sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Meal Modifications in Child Care Facilities in the CACFP* and visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) Standard Operating Procedures webpage.

Best Practices for Field Trips

The best practices below address strategies to ensure that field trips meals are reimbursable and follow food safety requirements.

- **Develop SOP:** Develop a field trip SOP that provides clear written procedures for the following: 1) food safety procedures for preparing, transporting, storing, and serving field trip meals, including temperature control, handwashing, and proper food handling procedures during transport and meal service; and how to handle leftover meals or foods (including milk); 2) instructions for identifying reimbursable meals and conducting point-of-service meal counts; and 3) a plan for informing substitutes and volunteers of the requirements for field trip meals.

- **Maintain ongoing communication:** Disseminate the SOP to food service staff and all applicable field trip staff (including volunteers). Reinforce proper procedures for field trip meals through various communication channels, such as staff meetings, emails, employee handbooks, written instructions, and the CACFP facility's website.

- **Provide staff training:** Provide regular training for all staff involved with field trip meals.

- **Develop point-of-service meal count instructions:** Include point-of-service meal count instructions for field trip staff with the delivery of the field trip meals. For example, laminate the meal count instructions and attach them to the food transport containers.

- **Provide signage for meal components:** Use clear signage on the transport containers to help field trip staff identify the required meal components.

By implementing these best practices, CACFP facilities can ensure that field trip meals comply with the CACFP meal patterns for children, the USDA's requirement for point-of-service meal counts, and food safety requirements.

Taking Meal Components Off-site from At-risk Afterschool Centers

CACFP at-risk afterschool centers may choose to allow children to take one vegetable, fruit, or grain item off-site to eat later. This food item must be from the child's own meal or from a share table (refer to "Share tables" below). At-risk afterschool centers must ensure that allowing food items to be taken off-site complies with all local and state health and safety codes.

The USDA encourages at-risk afterschool centers to use this flexibility to increase children's consumption of vegetables and fruits and help reduce potential food waste in the CACFP. For more information, refer to USDA Memo CACFP 10-2017: *Taking Food Components Off-site in the At-Risk Afterschool Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Share tables

Share tables are permitted in CACFP at-risk afterschool programs. These tables or stations allow children to return whole food or beverage items they choose not to eat, provided this practice adheres to local and state health and food safety codes. The returned items are available to other children who may want to eat additional servings or save them for later.

Using share tables encourages the consumption of nutritious foods and reduces food waste in the Child Nutrition Programs. For more information, refer to USDA Memo SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, and SFSP 15-2016: *Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs*.

6 — Prohibition of Gender Separation

In general, the USDA's nondiscrimination laws and policies in 7 CFR Parts 15, 15a, and 15b do not permit intuitions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs to separate children on any protected basis during the service of reimbursable meals or snacks. Federal law prohibits discrimination based on gender at any educational institution receiving federal assistance.

USDA Exceptions

The USDA allows two exceptions to the prohibition of gender-separated meal service.

1. **Coeducational schools and school-based sites:** The USDA recognizes religious exemptions granted by the federal Department of Education (ED) without prior express approval. ED guidelines allow school and school-based sites to apply for an exemption when federal law prohibiting gender separation is inconsistent with the institution's religious tenets. These exemptions apply broadly to operations, including the meal service at a given site, such as a faith-based school. Additionally, ED guidelines specifically allow for the approval of gender-separate instruction at public primary and secondary non-vocational schools that could take a variety of forms. Since the general rule is that gender separation during meal service is prohibited, a coeducational school may not use limited ED approval of gender-separate instruction to justify blanket gender separation during meal service. Limited exemptions in these situations must be approved by the USDA.

2. **Other institutions and organizations:** State agencies may approve exemptions allowing separation by gender during meal service without express prior approval from the USDA in the following circumstances:
    - meal service at religious institutions operating under the dictates of the religion with which they are affiliated;
    - meal service at juvenile correctional facilities where combining members of the opposite gender would present a potential safety risk; and
    - meal service at facilities that fully separate by gender as part of their normal operations, e.g., gender-separated summer camps.

When requesting an exemption, the institution must submit the request in writing to the CSDE and specify which reason applies and why separation by gender is necessary.

6 | Prohibition of Gender Separation

The two exceptions described above are the only acceptable bases for gender separation during meal service in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs. Any gender separation not based on the ED or USDA approval processes is strictly prohibited.

Situations that do not clearly fit into any of the exemptions outlined above may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the CSDE in direct consultation with the USDA Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Regional Office, including the FNA Civil Rights Office and appropriate FNA National Office Child Nutrition Program staff.

For more information, refer to USDA Memo SP 31 2015, CACFP 12-2015, and SFSP 14-2015: *Guidance on Prohibition of Separation by Gender during Child Nutrition Program Meal Service.*

7 — Water Availability

Section 7 CFR 226.25(i) of the CACFP regulations requires that CACFP facilities must make plain potable water available to children throughout the day, including during the meal and snack service. “Potable” means water that is safe for human consumption.

Water must be made available for children to drink upon their request. CACFP facilities may also choose to make water available for children to self-serve. Some examples include providing disposable cups near sinks that are available to children, with a step stool if children are unable to reach the sink; and providing covered water pitchers and disposable cups if water fountains are not available.

> While drinking water must be made available to children during the meal and snack service, CACFP facilities are not required to serve water with meals or snacks. CACFP facilities must have water readily available nearby to provide to children upon request; however, water is not required to be on the table. Water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or snacks.

If safe water is not readily available in a facility, purchasing water for children is a reasonable and allowable cost for CACFP facilities. However, purchasing water for consumption by adults or CACFP facility employees is not an allowable cost.

Considerations for Offering Water

There are some important considerations to keep in mind when offering water to children during the meal and snack service.

- Avoid serving young children too much water before and during mealtimes. Excess water may reduce the amount of food and milk that children consume at mealtimes.
- Water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or snacks.
- Water may be served at the table along with milk. However, water cannot be served instead of milk at meals.
- Children are not required to take water.

- When snack menus include juice or milk as one of the two required meal components, CACFP facilities cannot offer water as a choice instead of juice or milk.
- Water should be served at snack if the snack menu does not include milk or juice.
- Outside of the CACFP reimbursable meal and snack service, offer water instead of sweetened beverages such as juice drinks, soda, and sports drinks. These types of sweetened beverages are not recommended for child care programs.
- CACFP facilities cannot promote or offer water or any other beverage as an alternative to fluid milk.

For more information and resources, refer to USDA Memo CACFP 20-2016: *Water Availability in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.*

Resources for Offering Water

The resources below address the requirement for offering water to children during the meal service.

- Grab and Go Lesson: Offering and Making Water Available in Child Care (ICN): https://theicn.org/resources/1538/nutrition-and-meal-management/117771/offering-and-making-water-available-in-child-care.pdf
- Offering Water in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/offering-water-cacfp
- USDA Memo CACFP 20-2016: Water Availability in the Child and Adult Care Food Program: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/water-availability
- USDA Memo SP 49-2016 and CACFP 18-2016: Resources for Making Potable Water Available in Schools and Child Care Facilities: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/resources-making-potable-water-available-schools-and-child-care-facilities-0

For more information, visit "Water Availability" in the "Meal Service" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage

8 — Family-provided Meal Components for Medical or Special Dietary Needs

CACFP facilities may choose whether they will allow families to provide meal components as part of reimbursable meals for children with special dietary needs. The CACFP regulations specify different requirements for these meal components depending on whether they are provided for disability or non-disability reasons.

Family-provided Meal Components for Disability Reasons

Section 7 CFR 226.20(g)(1)(iv) of the CACFP regulations allows parents/guardians to supply one or more meal components of a reimbursable meal for disability reasons. The CACFP facility must provide at least one required meal component. A meal that meets these requirements is reimbursable.

CACFP facilities cannot require parents/guardians to supply one or more meal components of a reimbursable meal for a child with a disability. CACFP facilities are responsible for providing appropriate meal modifications for children with a disability based on the medical statement from a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian.

Family-provided Meal Components for Non-Disability Reasons

Section 7 CFR 226.20(g)(2)(iii)) of the CACFP regulations allows parents/guardians to supply one meal component of a reimbursable meal for non-disability reasons. This substitution may be due to medical or other special dietary needs, such as food preferences or restrictions due to religious, ethnic, moral, or other reasons. The term “special dietary needs” is intentionally broad to encompass a variety of situations that may not be classified as disabilities but can still affect or limit a child’s diet.

The requirements for reimbursable meals depend on whether the family-provided substitution is within or outside the CACFP meal patterns for children.

- **Substitutions within the CACFP meal patterns:** Meals are reimbursable when the parent/guardian provides one substitution that meets the CACFP meal patterns for children. An example is substituting one type of fruit for another, such as pears for peaches. For a reimbursable meal, the CACFP facility must provide the child with the remaining required CACFP meal components. A medical statement is not required when

the substitution provided by the parent/guardian is within the CACFP meal patterns for children.

- **Substitutions outside the CACFP meal patterns:** When the substitution provided by the parent/guardian is a noncreditable food that does not meet the CACFP meal patterns for children, CACFP facilities must obtain a medical statement signed by a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. For a reimbursable meal, the CACFP facility must provide the child with the remaining required meal components.

If the substitution provided by the parent/guardian does not meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements and the parent/guardian does not provide a medical statement, that food or beverage is a noncreditable food offered in addition to the reimbursable meal (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Noncreditable Foods for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*). In this situation, the CACFP facility must provide the child with all required CACFP meal components for a reimbursable meal.

Required Documentation for Family-provided Meal Components

The CACFP facility must be approved by the CSDE to claim reimbursement for meals with foods or beverages provided by the child's family. The CACFP facility must submit a written request to the CSDE that includes the information below.

1. Detail the child's medical or special dietary need that requires a family-provided meal component. If the substitution does not meet the CACFP meal patterns, attach a copy of the medical statement signed by the child's state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. For guidance on the requirements for medical statements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the "Medical Statements" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

2. Indicate the specific foods and beverages that will be provided by the parent/guardian and the meal components to which they belong.

> Parents/guardians may supply one or more meal components for disability reasons but no more than one meal component for non-disability reasons.

3. Include a statement of assurance that the CACFP facility will serve all other required meal components of the reimbursable meal.

If the request is approved, the CSDE will issue a written response for the acceptable family-provided meal components. This CSDE approval applies only to the individual child for whom the request has been granted. The CACFP facility must maintain this approval on file with the child's other medical records.

For detailed guidance on meal modifications for disability or non-disability reasons, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Food Safety Considerations

When determining whether to allow foods brought from home, CACFP facilities must consider food safety issues and the liability that might arise if a child gets a foodborne illness. The FDA Food Code applies to all foods served in child care centers and emergency shelters, regardless of whether they are prepared on site or brought from home.

FDA Food Code requires approved source

The FDA Food Code requires that all foods served in food service establishments must be from an approved source (i.e., commercial supplies under regulatory control) and transported properly at required temperatures. The FDA Food Code applies to child care centers and emergency shelters but does not apply to family day care homes. However, family day care homes must follow proper procedures to ensure the safety of meals and snacks served to children in the CACFP.

> Foods sent into the CACFP facility from a private home have not originated from an approved source. CACFP facilities cannot ensure that food brought from home is safe from microbial contamination or cross-contact with potential food allergens.

There are potential liability issues if CACFP facilities serve foods that have not been directly received from a regulated source (such as an approved food service vendor) or stored, cooked, and served by trained food service personnel.

CACFP facilities that choose to allow family-provided foods should have policies in place to address food safety standards. These policies should include:

- clearly labeling all foods with the child's name, date, and type of food;
- storing foods at an appropriate temperature until they are eaten; and
- prohibiting children from sharing foods with other children.

For information and resources on food safety, visit the CSDE's Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage and the DPH's Food Protection Program webpage. The CSDE encourages CACFP facilities to check with their local health department regarding appropriate food safety procedures for foods sent from home.

9 — Resources

This section includes additional resources and websites for the CACFP. More links to information on the federal and state requirements and guidance for the CACFP are available on the CSDE's Program Guidance for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage. For a comprehensive list of resources on the CACFP meal patterns for children and crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Patterns*.

Meal Pattern Requirements

Bite Size: Meeting the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns ("Bite Size Meal Pattern Training" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-cacfp-child-care-programs/bite-size-meal-pattern-training

CACFP Meal Pattern Updates (CSDE's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/child-and-adult-care-food-program #CACFP_Meal_Pattern_Updates

Guide to Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in At-risk Afterschool Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/atrisk/guide_ovs_cacfp_at_risk_afterschool_programs.pdf

Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program

Menu Forms ("Menu Forms and Production Records" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/menu-forms-and-production-records

Nutrition Standards for CACFP Meals and Snacks (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/nutrition-standards

Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/summary_final_rule_cacfp_meal_patterns.pdf

USDA Final Rule Correction: CACFP Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the HHFKA of 2010 (81 FR 75671):
https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/11/01/2016-26339/child-and-adult-care-food-program-meal-pattern-revisions-related-to-the-healthy-hunger-free-kids-act

USDA Final Rule: CACFP Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (81 FR 24347):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/fr-042516

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524

USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs (91 FR 25073):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-050826

USDA Memo CACFP 02-2025: Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meals in CACFP:
https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cacfp/offer-versus-serve-family-style-meals

USDA Memo CACFP 08-2017: Questions and Answers on the Updated Meal Pattern Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/qas-updated-meal-pattern-requirements

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp

USDA Memo CACFP 17-2017: Documenting Meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/documenting-meals

USDA Memo SP 19-2024, CACFP 07-2024, and SFSP 12-2024: Initial Implementation Memorandum: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/initial-implementation-meal-patterns-dga

Program Guidance

CACFP Afterschool Programs (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/afterschool

CACFP At-risk Afterschool Care Centers (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-at-risk-afterschool-care-centers

CACFP Child Care Centers (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-child-care-centers

CACFP Emergency Shelters (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-emergency-shelters

CACFP Family Day Care Homes (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-family-day-care-homes

CACFP Halftime: Thirty on Thursdays Training Webinar Series (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/cacfp/halftime-thirty-thursdays-training-webinars

CACFP Handbooks (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/handbooks

CACFP Meal Pattern Training Worksheets (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/cacfp/meal-pattern-training-worksheets

CACFP Updates (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-updates

Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Documents and Resources (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/resources

Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/food-safety-for-child-nutrition-programs

Forms for CACFP Child Care Centers (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-child-care-centers/forms

Forms for CACFP Homes (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-family-day-care-homes/forms

Laws and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/laws-and-regulations-for-child-nutrition-programs

9 | Resources

Manuals and Guides for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/manuals-and-guides-for-child-nutrition-programs

Operational Memoranda for the CACFP (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/lists/operational-memoranda-for-the-cacfp

Program Guidance for CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-cacfp-child

Resources for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/resources-for-child-nutrition-programs

Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program

Training for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/training-for-child-nutrition-programs

Glossary

Administrative Review (AR): A periodic review of an institution's operations of the Child Nutrition Programs, conducted by the Connecticut State Department of Education to monitor performance and assess compliance with all USDA regulations.

at-risk afterschool care centers: The at-risk afterschool meals component of the CACFP provides reimbursement for snacks and suppers served to children through age 18 who are participating in afterschool programs in eligible (at-risk) areas. The program provides funds to public and private nonprofit (federal tax-exempt) and for-profit organizations, and schools, for nutritious snacks and suppers served as part of organized programs of care, which are known to help reduce or prevent children's involvement in high-risk behaviors. All snacks must meet the requirements of the CACFP meal patterns for children. For more information, visit the USDA's CACFP Afterschool Programs webpage and the CSDE's CACFP At-risk Afterschool Care Centers webpage.

CACFP facilities: Child care centers, family day care homes, emergency shelters, and at-risk afterschool programs that participate in the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program.

CACFP meal patterns for children: The required meal components and minimum serving sizes that facilities participating in the CACFP must provide to receive federal reimbursement for meals and snacks served to children. The CACFP meal patterns apply to children ages 1-12; children ages 15 and younger of migrant workers; children of any age with disabilities; and children through age 18 in at-risk afterschool care centers and emergency shelters. For more information, visit the "CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

CACFP sponsor: A public or private nonprofit organization that is entirely responsible for the administration of the CACFP in one or more day care homes, child care centers, emergency shelters, at-risk afterschool care centers, or adult day care centers. In some situations, for-profit institutions may also be eligible to participate in the CACFP. For more information, refer to the section 7 CFR 226.2 of the CACFP regulations.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): The USDA's federally assisted meal program providing nutritious meals and snacks to children in child care centers, family day care homes, and emergency shelters, and snacks and suppers to children participating in eligible at-risk afterschool care programs. The CACFP also provides meals and snacks to adults who receive care in nonresidential adult day care centers. For more information, visit the USDA's CACFP webpage and the CSDE's CACFP webpage.

Glossary

Child Nutrition Programs: The USDA's federally funded programs that provide nutritious meals and snacks to children, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Snack Program (ASP), Special Milk Program (SMP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The CACFP also provides nutritious meals and snacks to the frail elderly in adult day care centers. For more information, visit the CSDE's Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

combination-style meal service: A method of meal service that combines pre-plated meal service and family-style meal service. Some foods in the meal are pre-plated while others are served family style.

congregate meals and snacks: Meals and snacks served to and consumed by children in a supervised group setting on the premises of the CACFP facility.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: A federal document that provides science-based advice for Americans ages 2 and older to promote health and reduce risk for chronic diseases through diet and physical activity. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture jointly publish the *Dietary Guidelines* every five years. This document forms the basis of federal food, nutrition education and information programs. For more information, visit the Dietary Guidelines for Americans webpage.

disability: A condition in which a person has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

family-style meal service: A method of meal service that allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults, if needed. For more information, refer to "Family-style Meal Service" in section 3.

food item: A specific food offered within the meal components that comprise reimbursable meals in the CACFP. A food item may contain one or more meal components or more than one serving of a single component. For example, macaroni and cheese is one food item that provides two meal components (grains and MMA). A 2-ounce whole grain bagel is one food item that provides 2 oz eq of grains.

meal components: The five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs, including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates. For information on the individual meal components, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

meal pattern: The required meal components and minimum servings that schools and institutions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs must provide to receive federal reimbursement for meals and snacks served to participants. For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

meals: Refer to "reimbursable meals" in this section.

medical statement: A document signed by a state-licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian that identifies the specific medical conditions and appropriate meal modifications for a participant with special dietary needs due to disability or non-disability reasons. The USDA requires that medical statements for disability reasons must include: 1) information about the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the CACFP facility to understand how it restricts the child's diet; 2) an explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability; and 3) if appropriate, the food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the "Medical Statements" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

menu item: Any planned main dish, vegetable, fruit, bread, grain, or milk that is part of the reimbursable meal. Menu items consist of food items.

menu of record: The official menu that documents exactly what is served each day in the CACFP facility. This provides a record of the meal components and portion sizes served to all enrolled children and provides documentation for the number of CACFP meals and snacks claimed for reimbursement.

offer versus serve (OVS): An optional approach to menu planning and meal service that allows children ages 6-18 in at-risk afterschool programs to decline some of the foods offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper. OVS is not allowed at snack. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Offer versus Serve in At-Risk Afterschool Centers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

point-of-service meal/snack counts: The moment in the meal service where supervising staff can accurately determine that the child has been served all required meal components for a reimbursable meal or snack. For more information, refer to "Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts" in section 1.

pre-plated meal service: A method of meal service where staff pre-plate each child's plate and cup with the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the meal pattern requirements for each age group. For more information, refer to "Pre-plated meal service" in section 2.

registered dietitian (RD) or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN): The Commission on Dietetic Registration defines a RD and RDN as someone who has completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree at a U.S. regionally accredited university or college and course work accredited or approved by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND); completed an ACEND-accredited supervised practice program at a health-care facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies; passed a national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR); and completed continuing professional educational requirements to maintain registration. For more information, visit the AND's What is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist website and the CDR's Registered Dietitian (RD) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) Certification website.

reimbursable meals and snacks: Meals and snacks that meet the meal pattern requirements of the USDA regulations and are eligible for USDA funds. Reimbursable meals and snacks contain the minimum serving of each required meal component.

serving size or portion: The weight, measure, or number of pieces or slices of a food or beverage. For meals and snacks to be reimbursable, adult day care centers must provide the minimum servings specified in the CACFP adult meal patterns.

state-licensed healthcare professional: An individual who is authorized to write medical prescriptions under state law and is recognized by the State Department of Public Health (DPH). In Connecticut, recognized medical authorities include physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA) and certified physician assistants (PAC), doctors of osteopathy (DO), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), i.e., nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and certified nurse anesthetists who are licensed as APRNs. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications for Child Care Programs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and visit the "Medical Statements" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

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