

Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs

This document summarizes the crediting requirements for lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk in the school nutrition programs. These requirements apply to all public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) school nutrition programs. The school nutrition programs include the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#), [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#), [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#) of the NSLP, [Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#) of the NSLP, [Special Milk Program \(SMP\)](#), and [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\) At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program](#) implemented in schools.

Note: The information in this document is based on the current guidance in [USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program](#) and is subject to change. Additional guidance from the USDA may impact how the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025](#) applies to school nutrition programs other than the NSLP, including the SBP, SSO, ASP, SMP, and CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program. The CSDE will update this document as the USDA issues future guidance.

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School food authorities (SFAs) may choose, but are not required, to offer a choice of lactose-free/reduced milk to all students. Lactose-free milk and lactose-reduced milk are fluid milk and credit the same as regular milk in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs. These types of milk are processed by adding lactase enzymes to reduce or eliminate the lactose (naturally occurring milk sugar) found in regular milk.

Children who cannot digest the lactose found in regular milk may be able to drink lactose-free/reduced milk. The USDA recommends these types of milk as the first choice for children with lactose intolerance.

Allowable Types of Lactose-Free/Reduced Milk

The USDA's meal patterns for the school nutrition programs have different milk requirements. These requirements address milk fat content and restrictions for flavored milk. The allowable types of lactose-free/reduced milk for each meal pattern are indicated below.

- **NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12:** Whole milk, reduced fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk, which may be unflavored or flavored. Flavored milk served in reimbursable meals cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. **Note:** The addition of whole milk and reduced fat (2%) as allowable milk options for grades K-12 is effective January 14, 2026, and applies only to the NSLP as required by the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025](#).
- **SBP and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and SMP for grades K-12:** Low fat (1%) milk and fat-free milk, which may be unflavored or flavored. Flavored milk served in reimbursable meals and snacks cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.
- **NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns and SMP for preschool (ages 1-5):** Unflavored whole milk for age 1, and unflavored low-fat milk or unflavored fat-free milk for ages 2-5.

Public schools must also meet the additional state beverage requirements for milk under [Section 10-221q](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.). For more information, refer to "[Additional State Requirements for Milk in Public Schools](#)" in this document.

For more information on fluid milk, visit the "[Allowable Types of Milk](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Additional State Requirements for Milk in Public Schools

In addition to meeting the USDA's requirements for fluid milk, public schools must comply with the state beverage requirements of [C.G.S. Section 10-221q](#). Milk cannot contain artificial sweeteners and cannot exceed 4 grams of sugar per ounce. These requirements apply to all types of fluid milk (including lactose-free/reduced milk) available for sale to students in public schools, including reimbursable meals, afterschool snacks, a la carte sales, and the SMP.

Commercial products that meet the federal and state requirements for milk are included in List 16: Milk on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage. For more information on the state beverage statute, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Beverages for Connecticut Public Schools](#), and visit the CSDE's [Beverage Requirements](#) webpage.

The state beverage statute does not apply to private schools or RCCIs.

Requests for Lactose-Free/Reduced Milk

Parents/guardians are not required to submit a written request for lactose-free/reduced milk. These products are fluid milk and credit as the milk component in the school nutrition programs.

Fluid Milk and the Dietary Specifications

Effective January 14, 2026, for the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12 only, the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025](#) excludes the saturated fat in fluid milk (including lactose-free/reduced milk) when calculating the weekly average saturated fat requirement of the dietary specifications for lunch. All other dietary specifications (including calories, sodium, and beginning July 1, 2027, added sugars) still apply to the entire reimbursable meal. The contribution from all fluid milk must be included in these calculations.

Note: The saturated fat exemption for fluid milk does not apply to the dietary specifications for the SBP. Therefore, fluid milk must be included when calculating the weekly dietary specifications for breakfast, including calories, saturated fat, sodium, and beginning July 1, 2027, added sugars.

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Summary of Requirements

The table below summarizes the federal and state requirements for lactose-free/reduced milk in the school nutrition programs.

Table 1. Summary of requirements for lactose-free/reduced milk

Requirements	Implementation guidance
Allowable types (USDA meal pattern regulations)	<p>Must meet the meal pattern requirements for each grade group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12: Whole milk, reduced-fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk, which may be unflavored or flavored (cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces). • SBP and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and SMP for grades K-12: Low-fat milk and fat-free milk, unflavored or flavored (cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces). • NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns and SMP for preschool (ages 1-5): Unflavored whole milk for age 1, and unflavored low-fat milk or unflavored fat-free milk for ages 2-5.
Public schools only: State nutrition standards (C.G.S. Section 10-221g: beverages)	In addition to the USDA's requirements for fluid milk above, milk available for sale to students in public schools cannot exceed 4 grams of total sugars per ounce and cannot contain artificial sweeteners (refer to " Additional State Requirements for Milk in Public Schools " in this document).
Documentation	None required: Lactose-free/reduced milk are fluid milk and credit as the milk component in the school nutrition programs.

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Requirements	Implementation guidance
Weekly dietary specifications for school meals (apply only to the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12)	<p>The dietary specifications exclude fluid milk (including lactose-free/reduced milk) from the weekly limit for saturated fat at lunch only. All other dietary specifications (calories, sodium, and beginning July 1, 2027, added sugars) still apply to the entire reimbursable meal, and the contribution from all types of fluid milk must be included in those calculations (refer to “Fluid milk and the dietary specifications” in this document).</p> <p>Note: This exemption does not apply to the dietary specifications for the SBP. The calories, saturated fat, sodium, and beginning July 1, 2027, added sugars, are included for all types of fluid milk (including lactose-free/reduced milk) when calculating the weekly dietary specifications for breakfast.</p>
Identifying allowable products	Commercial products that meet the federal and state requirements for nondairy beverages are included in List 16: Milk on the CSDE’s List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage.

Pricing Considerations

SFAs cannot charge more for reimbursable meals that contain lactose-free/reduced milk. SFAs may allow students to purchase lactose-free/reduced milk a la carte (separately from reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks). As with all a la carte items, the price charged to students should reflect the actual cost of the item plus an amount determined by the SFA’s formula for a la carte pricing. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s [Pricing Worksheet for A La Carte Sales in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

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Resources

[Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/guide_meal_modifications_snp.pdf

[Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_dietary_specifications_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf

[List 16: Milk](#) (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/fblast/acceptablefoodsl16.pdf>

[Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs>

[Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs>

[Milk Substitutes](#) (CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs/milk-substitutes>

[NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10\(d\)\(1\): Types of fluid milk:](#)

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-210#p-210.10\(d\)\(2\)\(ii\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-210#p-210.10(d)(2)(ii))

[Pricing Worksheet for A La Carte Sales in the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/nonprogram_pricing_a_la_carte_introduction.pdf

[SBP regulations 7 CFR 220.8\(d\): Fluid milk requirements:](#)

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.8\(d\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.8(d))

[Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs>

[Summary Charts of the Requirements for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/summary_chart_meal_modifications_snp.pdf

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[USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(89 FR 31962\):](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for>

[USDA Final Rule: Fluid Milk Substitutions in the School Nutrition Programs \(73 FR 52903\):](https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-091208)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-091208>

[USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals:](https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fluid-milk-requirements-schools)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fluid-milk-requirements-schools>

[USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program:](https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/wmfhka-implementation)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/wmfhka-implementation>

[USDA Memo SP 02-2009: Final Fluid Milk Substitution Rule:](https://www.fns.usda.gov/final-fluid-milk-substitution-rule)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/final-fluid-milk-substitution-rule>

[What's in a Meal Module 9: Milk Component](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module9) (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module9>

[Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025:](https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/222/text)

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/222/text>

For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/lactose_free_reduced_milk_snp.pdf.



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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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