

# 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.



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

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 allowable types of lactose-free/reduced milk are the same as the allowable types of fluid milk in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs.

- Effective January 14, 2026, the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025](#) revised the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12 to allow whole and reduced fat (2%) milk, in addition to low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk.
- Effective June 8, 2026, the USDA final rule, [Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#), revises the SBP and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns for ages 2-5 to include whole milk, reduced fat milk, low-fat milk and fat-free milk. Flavored milk is not allowed for preschoolers. The preschool meal patterns for ages 1 require unflavored whole milk.

For the meal patterns for grades K-12, flavored milk served in reimbursable meals cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. Flavored milk sold la carte in middle and high schools cannot exceed 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces.

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 [“Allowable Types of Milk”](#) in the “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 10-221g](#). 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 for K-12 Lunch and Breakfast Menus

The USDA's recent updates to the milk component of the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 exclude 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 and breakfast. 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.

## Summary of Requirements

Table 1 summarizes the federal and state requirements for lactose-free/reduced milk in the school nutrition programs.

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

Requirements	Implementation guidance
Allowable types (USDA meal pattern regulations)	<p>Credits the same as regular milk in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs and must meet the meal pattern requirements for each grade group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SMP meal patterns for grades K-12:</b> Whole milk, reduced-fat milk, low-fat milk, and fat-free milk, which may be unflavored or flavored. Flavored milk cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.</li> <li>• <b>NSLP, SBP, ASP preschool meal patterns and SMP for preschool (ages 1-5):</b> Unflavored whole milk for age 1, and unflavored whole milk, reduced-fat milk, low-fat milk, and fat-free milk for ages 2-5.</li> </ul> <p>For guidance on crediting milk, visit <a href="#">“Allowable Types of Milk”</a> in the “Milk” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p>
<b>Public schools only:</b> State nutrition standards ( <a href="#">C.G.S. Section 10-221q: beverages</a> )	<p>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 <a href="#">“Additional State Requirements for Milk in Public Schools”</a> in this document).</p>
Documentation	<p>None required: Lactose-free/reduced milk is fluid milk and credits as the milk component in the school nutrition programs.</p>
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 and breakfast for grades K-12. 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 <a href="#">“Fluid milk and the dietary specifications”</a> in this document).</p>

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

Requirements	Implementation guidance
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 <a href="#">List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages</a> 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](#).

## 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](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](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/acceptablefoodlist16.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>

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[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)(1))

[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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/nonprogram_pricing_a_la_carte_introduction.pdf) (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/nonprogram\\_pricing\\_a\\_la\\_carte\\_introduction.pdf](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\(d\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.8(d))

[Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/summary_chart_meal_modifications_snp.pdf)

(CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/summary\\_chart\\_meal\\_modifications\\_snp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/summary_chart_meal_modifications_snp.pdf)

[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-americans)

[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-americans)

[USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs \(91 FR 25073\):](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/08/2026-09212/expanding-fluid-milk-options-in-child-nutrition-programs)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/08/2026-09212/expanding-fluid-milk-options-in-child-nutrition-programs>

[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>

[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>

[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>

[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>

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[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>

[USDA Memo SP 08-2026 and CACFP 04-2026: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs:](#)

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/guidance-documents/fns-SP08-CACFP04-2026expandingFluidMilkOptions.pdf>

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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/lactose_free_reduced_milk_snp.pdf).



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

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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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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