

## Guidance on Limiting Cafeterias to 250 People

### Purpose

On March 13, 2020, Governor Scott issued [Executive Order Number 01-20](#), which prohibits all non-essential mass gatherings of 250 people or more, including within cafeterias. Some Vermont schools will need to adjust their school meals service to comply with this order. When considering the number of people in the cafeteria, schools should consider both the number of students and the number of adults in the room during each lunch period. The following guidance instructs these schools on best practices for complying.

Schools with fewer than 250 students in the cafeteria may also choose to implement these changes. As always, schools are urged to use common sense and select the options that are the best fit for their school.

Please also refer to the [Guidance for School Nutrition Operations](#) section of the AOE's COVID-19 Guidance for Vermont Schools page for additional resources.

### Serving Unitized Meals in the Classroom

Many schools already serve unitized meals in the classroom at breakfast. For these schools, adopting this service method for lunch as well will be the simplest way to follow the executive order, as procedures for counting and claiming meals in the classroom have already been established. If serving unitized meals in the classroom, make sure the following items have been addressed:

- A unitized meal must include all of the required components for the meal type. A unitized meal is considered "Serve." "Offer vs. Serve" is not a suggested service method for meals served in the classroom. If the school is stopping their use of Offer vs. Serve, we request that the SFA update the school's site application to indicate that "Serve" will be the method. The SFA should make this application adjustment at their convenience, and will need to save and re-submit the application for re-approval.
- Milk choice is still required with a unitized meal. This can be accomplished in the following ways:
  - Offer meals packaged with at least 2 types of milk and allow students to select their meal;
  - Offer at least two types of milk in a crate or cooler that the students can choose from at the time they select their meal;
  - Allow students to pre-order their milk type.
- Meals must still be counted at the point of service. This means that either a food service staff member or a trained teacher must check off or otherwise indicate when a student

### Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact: [Child Nutrition Programs](#) at the Vermont Agency of Education.

takes a meal. Counting meals sent to the classroom or meals returned is not an acceptable counting method. Unless the school is operating Provision 2 or CEP, the names of the students who take a meal must be recorded. If paper rosters are used, ensure that these rosters do not include students' free and reduced status.

- Food safety practices should be followed when serving perishable meals in the classroom. The best option is to serve meals immediately. However, if the meals will not be served immediately, hot boxes and coolers should be used to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Please continue to follow all food safety requirements in the [Vermont Food Code](#). HACCP plans may need to be adjusted to include new procedures.
- Plan for sanitization of eating areas, such as desks or tables. Classroom teachers may need to be provided with appropriate supplies for sanitizing desks and tables.
- Allow time for students to wash their hands prior to and after eating.
- Additional trash and janitorial services may be necessary when serving meals in the classroom.
- The "And Justice for All" poster should be posted in each area where the students receive meals. Additional posters can be requested by contacting [Child Nutrition Programs](#). These posters should be posted as soon as is practical, but lack of posters should not stop the school from implementing this service model.

### **Providing Unitized Meals in the Cafeteria for Consumption in the Classroom**

If serving meals in the classroom is not feasible for counting and claiming purposes, unitized meals may be provided in the cafeteria or in other centralized locations where a trained staff member can count the meals at the point of service, and then students will take the meals back to their classroom to eat. If this option is used, see the above section on [serving unitized meals in the classroom](#) for information on unitized meals, milk choice, sanitization, hand washing, and janitorial services. In addition, please consider:

- Take steps to ensure social distancing when students are waiting to receive their meals. Stagger the classrooms going through the line or cafeteria to reduce interactions and number of students waiting at one time.
- If pin numbers are used, have a staff member enter the pin number on behalf of students
- If student ID cards are handed in to count meals, sanitize the cards in between uses.

### **Providing Standard Meal Service in the Cafeteria for Consumption in the Classroom**

If serving meals in the classroom is not feasible for counting and claiming purposes, and unitized meals are not possible, students may select their meals in the cafeteria and return to their classrooms to eat. Please follow the "Best Practices for Safe Meal Service" and "Food Service Sanitization" sections of the [COVID-19 Guidance for School Nutrition Program Operations](#) when using this method. In addition, follow the relevant guidance on meal consumption in the classroom and ensuring social distancing, above.

## **Adjusting Meal Times / Meal Periods to reduce the number of students**

Some schools may be able to add or adjust meal periods to reduce the number of individuals in the cafeteria below 250. This is also an acceptable option. Schools using this option should update their meal times in their Child Nutrition site application at their convenience. If you make changes to the site application, please save and re-submit the application packet for re-approval. Please review the “Best Practices for Safe Meal Service” and “Food Service Sanitization” sections of the [COVID-19 Guidance for School Nutrition Program Operations](#) for additional recommended steps when meals are served in the cafeteria.

## **Multiple Cafeterias**

Some schools have multiple cafeterias or eating spaces, or could create additional eating spaces by utilizing gyms or multi-purpose rooms. These schools may choose to use a variation on some of the options above by serving students in the cafeteria, but dividing them into multiple locations for eating. Schools using this option to reduce the number of students in any space at one time should consider taking measures to reduce student contact between groups. For instance, if students from multiple classrooms usually have the option to choose between multiple cafeterias or eating spaces, the SFA may choose to restrict students to one location to increase social distancing.

## **Feeding Pre-K Students**

When Pre-K students are co-mingled with older students during meal service, they may be served the NSLP/SBP meal pattern. However, if students are no longer co-mingled due to COVID-19 precautions, these students should receive meals that meet the CACFP meal pattern instead. Please see this [guidance on the meal patterns for Pre-K students](#). Child Nutrition Programs recognizes the extenuating circumstances and asks schools to follow these requirements to the extent that they are able. This requirement should not prevent the school from taking the necessary steps to reduce COVID-19 transmission.

## **Communicating the Changes to Students**

These changes may be confusing or upsetting to students. School administrators and food service staff should discuss the best way to communicate these changes in a calm and reassuring way. Please see this [CDC guidance on talking with children about Coronavirus](#) for suggested language and techniques.