

Waiver of Area Eligibility Requirements for SFSP/SSO During COVID-19

Purpose

On March 29, 2020, the USDA granted Vermont a waiver of area eligibility requirements to be an open site in the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option during unexpected school closures associated with COVID-19. The waiver requires that the state must have a plan for ensuring that new meal sites are targeting benefits to children in need. For example, children who may be newly eligible for benefits due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. The waiver is retroactive to March 20, 2020. The following is the state's plan for ensuring that new meal sites utilizing the waiver are targeted to benefit children in need, followed by information for sponsors electing to use the waiver to add additional open sites.

Open Sites Eligible Under the Waiver

School-Based Sites in Counties Where Businesses Have Been Closed Due to COVID-19

Child Nutrition Programs will allow new open sites located at any school, public or independent, previously operating any of the federal child nutrition programs and located in a county where businesses have been ordered to close, significantly alter business operations or cease in-person operations for at least one week during the past three months. On March 16, 2020, Governor Scott issued Addendum 2 to executive Order 01-20, which ordered that bars and restaurants in all regions of the state should not permit on-premises consumption of food or drink, effective from March 17, 2020, until April 6, 2020. Further executive orders in subsequent days restricted non-essential gatherings to 10 people or less and directed the closure of in-person operations for all non-essential businesses. Therefore, as of Friday, March 20, 2020, (effective date of waiver) any Vermont school previously operating any of the child nutrition programs may operate as an open site. Further, any of these schools may conduct grab 'n go and household or bus stop distribution out of these sites to reach any child, age 18 and under.

Non School-Based Sites Operated by Existing Sponsors

Child Nutrition Programs may allow existing child nutrition sponsors to use this waiver to add additional sites that are not located at schools. To use this waiver for these sites, the sponsor must supply Child Nutrition Programs with an email describing why the new site is well-located to serve children who are in need as a result of COVID-19. An existing child nutrition sponsor is any sponsor who has operated any of the child nutrition programs in the last two program years.



How to Use the Waiver

Site Applications

A program agreement, organization application and site application must be approved and on file with Child Nutrition Programs before reimbursable meals may be served at the new site. Other than as outlined in this document, meals served before the site application has been initially approved are not eligible to be claimed for reimbursement through the SFSP or SSO.

Sites Who Started After March 20, 2020

Previously non-area eligible sites located at schools who began operations on March 20, 2020, or later may update their site application to make the site an open site, by making the changes described in [Application Changes](#) below. All meals served to children, age 18 and under, may be claimed.

Sites Who Started Prior to March 20, 2020

Previously non-area eligible sites who began operations prior to March 20, 2020, have several options:

- If 50% or more of the children served prior to March 20, 2020, were free and reduced-price status children, the sponsor may update their site application to make the site an open site, by making the changes described in [Application Changes](#), below. The site should maintain the documentation showing that more than 50% of the children served prior to March 20, 2020, were free and reduced-price status children. In this case, the site type prior to March 20, 2020, would technically be “Closed Enrolled in a Non-Needy Area” – however, the CNP Web System is not capable of showing different site types for different dates on the same site application, and the reimbursement is the same for both site types.

Sites electing this choice will be required to submit meal count and eligibility documentation to the State Agency to prove 50% of the children served were free and reduced-price status children. Upon re-approving your application packet, a member of the Child Nutrition Programs team will send a secure email to the sponsor administrator indicated in the organization application. This email will request the consolidated counts for meals served up until March 20, 2020, with a benefit issuance list indicating each student’s status. If the benefit issuance list is coded, please include the key, e.g. 1 = free, 2 =reduced, 3= paid. If siblings were served, please indicate on the list which names belong to each household. If this information is not submitted by April 15, 2020, we may require that the start date of the site be changed to March 20, 2020, and not allow meals served prior to March 20, 2020, to be claimed.

- If fewer than 50% of the children served prior to March 20, 2020, were free and reduced-price status children, the sponsor should change the end date on their first site

application (non-residential camp site type) to March 19, 2020, and submit a new site application for an open site with March 20, 2020, as the start date. Follow the instructions in [Application Changes](#), below to complete the new site application. Please name this new site the same name as the original site with “-Open” added at the end (i.e. “Hometown Middle School – Open”). You will receive a warning message that “Breakfast start date cannot be in the past” and “Lunch start date cannot be in the past”. These are only “warnings”, not an “error” and will not prevent you from saving or submitting.

Code	Warning Description
203312	Breakfast start date cannot be in the past.
203372	Lunch start date cannot be in the past.

Meals served prior to March 20, 2020, would be claimed under the non-residential camp site and based on student status. All meals served to children, age 18 and under, on March 20 and later would be claimed under the new open site.

- If fewer than 50% of the children served prior to March 20, 2020, were free and reduced-price status children and the sponsor does not want to enter a new site application, they can change the site type of the application to “open” by following the instructions in [Application Changes](#), below, and change the start date of the original site application to March 20. If the sponsor chooses not to make a new site application, they may not claim federal reimbursement for any meals served prior to March 20, 2020. In this case, other non-federal funds would need to be found to cover the cost of the meals served prior to March 20, 2020.

Application Changes

Attachment List

- In the Attachment List section of the Application Packet, upload this, “Waiver of Area Eligibility Requirements for SFSP/SSO During COVID-19,” document.

Changing Site Type to “Open”

- In question 28, select Open as the Site Type.
- In question 29:
 - Eligibility Method, please select “School Data”.
 - For School District, please enter your SU or SD name.
 - For School Name, please enter the school name.
 - For Percentage of Enrollment Eligible for Free and Reduced-price Meals, please enter your school’s current Free and Reduced percentage, which can be found in the [Free and Reduced Report](#) on our Child Nutrition Programs webpage.
 - For Program Year of School Data, select 2019-2020.

- You will receive a warning message that “The school’s free and reduced percentage must be greater than or equal to 50%”. This is only a “warning”, not an “error” and will not prevent you from saving or submitting.

Code	Warning Description
203218	The school's free and reduced percentage must be greater than or equal to 50%.

End Dates

While you are revising your application packet, we also recommend you adjust your end date for all sites to be June 30, 2020. Revisions can be made at any point, so you may revise your site applications again in the future should a different end date be necessary.