

# Child Nutrition Weekly Update



## Responding to School Closings for H1N1 Outbreaks



Are you prepared to respond to school closings should an outbreak of the H1N1 virus occur in your LEA? Since the H1N1 virus has been shown to affect school-aged children disproportionately, and children are known to be highly likely to transmit flu viruses, especially in school and other group settings, **it is imperative that Child Nutrition Administrators across the state begin to develop plans for meal preparation (meal availability) should an outbreak cause school closings.** Public health experts are concerned that the novel H1N1 virus may persist into the fall, potentially as a more severe strain, causing more widespread serious and life-threatening illness which may prompt decision-makers to close school(s).

The time to begin planning for a possible outbreak is NOW. If you have not already been informed of or involved in your LEA's H1N1 Influenza Response Plan, please inquire with your Leadership to obtain a copy of the plan. It is important for you to know what your LEA expects of the Child Nutrition Program *before* a possible outbreak. Over half of all students enrolled in NC's public schools qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Should an outbreak cause school closings, many of these low-income students may not have access to other sources of food when school is closed.

The US Department of Agriculture has recently provided guidance concerning the role of local Child Nutrition Programs in providing meals to low-income students during school closures related to H1N1 Influenza outbreaks; the USDA Policy Memo is attached. LEA Child Nutrition Programs may continue to *prepare* meals at school for distribution to low-income students through the Summer Seamless Option (SSO) or the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The requirement to serve meals in a congregate setting will be waived, however, since congregate feeding is contraindicated during a H1N1 outbreak. Otherwise, the SSO will generally operate as it does during the summer months in that all meals provided to children 18 years and under will be reimbursed at the *free* School Meal Program rates (breakfast, lunch and/or snack) (For information about preparing meals under the SFSP, please contact Cynthia Ervin, SFSP Coordinator, at [cynthia.ervin@ncmail.net](mailto:cynthia.ervin@ncmail.net) for assistance.)

In order to prepare meals during an H1N1 under the SSO, schools must be enrolled, in advance, in the SSO. All SSO-approved sites will be considered "Closed-Enrolled" sites. The Child Nutrition Services section is in the process of preparing a "SSO Waiver Template" that contains specific information that will be required to issue a waiver to operate in a non-congregate meal setting. The waiver will require information, for each school, including the following:

- Meal service(s) provided (breakfast, lunch and/or snack);
- Method of meal distribution (this is the responsibility of the LEA, **not** the Child Nutrition Program unless "meal delivery" allows the "pick up" of meals from the school);
- Meal counting/claiming procedure; and
- Other information pertinent to the waiver request.

The decision to prepare meals during a school closure is ultimately a local decision. We encourage you to begin discussions with your LEA leadership as quickly as possible in order to be prepared should an outbreak, resulting in school closure(s) occur in your LEA.

Additional information will be provided in each *Child Nutrition Weekly Update*. We will provide more specific instructions about enrolling schools in the SSO, completing the Waivers, Meal/Site requirements and other related issues. We will also provide a series of Questions/Answers concerning school meals and H1N1 school closures in each *Child Nutrition Weekly Update*. This topic will also be discussed in detail during each region's Policy Update in September. We will make every effort to keep you informed as additional information becomes available.

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