



How to Establish Meal Service Times

Setting appropriate times to serve meals can help ensure a summer site thrives. Sponsors have flexibility in choosing when to set meal service times for each of their sites. This allows them to serve nutritious meals to as many children as possible.

The Importance of Meal Service Times

Each summer site is unique in the children it serves, where it is located and how it is run. This means that the time one summer site serves lunch may not work as well for another summer site. Establishing meal service times that meet operational requirements and the needs of the children is key to the success of the summer site.

Establishing Times for Your Site

Sponsors have great flexibility when deciding on their sites' meal service times so they can meet local needs:

- There are no Federal time limits on the length of a meal service;
- There are no Federal requirements on the amount of time that must pass between the beginning of one meal and the beginning of the next meal.

Once a sponsor decides on the meal times for each site, the sponsor must provide the meal times for each site to the State agency. This allows for effective oversight. Meals may be served outside of the approved meal times, but those meals cannot be claimed for reimbursement and Program funds cannot be used to cover the cost of those meals.

What to Consider

There are several factors to think about when deciding a summer site's meal service times, including:

- When are children in your area eating lunch, snacks or supper?
 - Some children may participate in various activities during the day that could conflict with meal service times.
- What age group are the children attending the summer site?
 - Teenagers tend to sleep in later in the morning. A later service time for breakfast may work better for a site with more teenagers.
 - A longer meal service period may work best for younger children who often need more time to eat.





USDA Resources

Regulations and Policies

- **SFSP Regulations: Meal service requirements, 7 CFR 225.16**
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d87b1089e455f65409bd1dbf463b3686&node=pt7.4.225&rqn=div5#se7.4.225_116
- **Meal Service Requirements, SP 13-2015 (v.2), SFSP 05-2015 (v.2), *Summer Meal Programs Meal Service Requirements Revised Q&As- Revised*, January 12, 2015**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/summer-meal-programs-meal-service-requirements-qas-revised>

Toolkit pages

- **How to Use Offer Versus Serve**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-OfferVersusServe.pdf>
- **Family Style Meals: A New Way to Teach Healthy Eating Habits**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-FamilyStyleMeals.pdf>
- **Serving Adults: What You Need to Know**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-AdultMeals.pdf>
- **What to Do with Leftover Meals**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-LeftoverMeals.pdf>
- **Successfully Operating a Congregate Feeding Site**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-CongregateFeeding.pdf>

Handbooks and Other Tools

- **Administrative Guidance for Sponsors**
This guide provides useful information on how to operate a summer site, including establishing meal service times.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/AdminGuideSponsors.pdf>
- **Innovative Strategies: Meal Service**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/best-practices-meal-service>





Additional Information

Sponsors and the general public should contact the appropriate State agency for additional guidance. State agencies should contact their FNS Regional Office for additional guidance.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

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Summer Meals Toolkit

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