

USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program: Managing Virtual Monitoring and Supply Chain Disruptions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes the extraordinary efforts of Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) professionals across the Nation to prioritize program integrity and the nutritional needs of participants during this challenging time. To help navigate the coming year, FNS is clarifying existing flexibilities available to assist State agencies and local program operators in meeting the unique needs of their communities.



Virtual Monitoring Update

COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response [#95](#) and [#96](#) allow State agencies and sponsoring organizations to continue monitoring activities of CACFP operations offsite until 30 days after the official end of the public health emergency. During the public health emergency, State agencies and sponsoring organizations have created innovative solutions to conduct offsite reviews and provide oversight of the CACFP during this unprecedented time. FNS encourages collaboration, sharing of tips, and best practices among State agencies and sponsoring organizations.

Tips and Best Practices for Virtual Monitoring:

- 1. Plan Ahead and Communicate:** Communicate with sponsoring organizations and facilities in advance of a virtual review to ensure they understand expectations and processes. Consider providing tips or trainings on how to prepare for a virtual review. Ensure sponsoring organizations and facilities understand options for uploading, e-mailing, or mailing necessary documentation.

Try these!

- The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (GA DECAL) developed a five-page Monitoring Guide to assist CACFP sponsoring organizations in conducting virtual monitoring of their sponsored facilities and daycare homes.
- GA DECAL also obtained a secured content program to request records securely and share files that supported virtual requests. The program notifies GA DECAL when records have been uploaded and documents are accessible by the entire team.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education and Maryland State Department of Education offered several options for receiving documentation, such as accessing electronic files via email or shared drive; having hard copies mailed to State agency offices or to another designated mailing address; or scheduling a contactless pickup of the records.

- 2. Develop a Standard Process:** Define how announced and unannounced reviews are conducted in a virtual setting, develop a process that is consistent among staff and institutions for a virtual review, and set timeframes to schedule phone/video calls.

Try these!

- The Arizona Department of Education developed a process for conducting unannounced meal observations, which includes contacting the institution the morning of the meal service and requesting that specific documentation, photos, etc. be provided to the State agency or mailed by a specified timeframe.
- GA DECAL observes the meal service using one of the following strategies: requesting photos of the meal prep and service, requesting a video of the meal prep and service, or scheduling a virtual meeting with the facility to observe the meal prep and service live.

- 3. Consider Feasibility of a Hybrid Approach:** Some State agencies and sponsoring organizations are choosing to conduct some elements of their reviews virtually and others on-site.

Try these!

- State agency and sponsoring organization staff may decide to conduct interviews and review records onsite in small groups, but opt to limit exposure to children by conducting meal observations using platforms such as Facetime, Skype, or Zoom, or via time and date stamped photos.
- Similarly, many have successfully conducted onsite meal observations, while also reviewing records and financial documents via live screensharing or accepting scanned or mailed-in documents.
- For large facilities with multiple classrooms, reviewers may visit one room to observe the meal service, and accept photos or video of remaining rooms. Various combinations of virtual and onsite approaches are appropriate when seeking to balance integrity with staff and participant safety.

- 4. Develop Checklists and Tools:** Develop record request timeframes along with a record request checklist to assist institutions and facilities in gathering records and/or videos and photos. Develop detailed instructions for reviewers, and a certificate of authenticity with time stamps and dates for any photos submitted as part of the virtual review.

Try these!

- GA DECAL developed a *Certificate of Authenticity* form for sponsors and institutions to describe photos and videos to better capture requirements being documented or verified. The form requires a description of photo/video, date taken, photographer/videographer name, etc.
- The Maryland State Department of Education developed a “Getting Ready for Your Compliance Review During the COVID-19 Pandemic” tip sheet and checklist to send to institutions to prepare for reviews.

- Another suggested strategy that is used by the Nevada Department of Agriculture is to provide the institution with a “Sponsor Checklist” a month prior to the scheduled review; the checklist can be attached to the invite that is sent by the State agency when scheduling the entrance conference.
5. **Document:** Consider making modifications to monitoring review forms, and be sure to thoroughly document any virtual reviews, interviews, and virtual meal observations conducted.
Try this! Many State agencies have developed specific monitoring forms to include language more reflective of the virtual setting. For example, recording “interview time” rather than “arrival time” and including more open-ended questions such as “Explain your meal preparation process,” and “How do you provide meal substitutions?”
 6. **Practice:** Practice using a virtual review platform among staff before conducting a review. The most successful virtual reviews occurred when CACFP operators received training and technical assistance to use a virtual platform.
Try this! The Nevada Department of Agriculture reaches out to sponsoring organizations before reviews to offer them assistance with using the virtual platform.

COVID-19 Supply Chain Disruptions: Menu Planning & Shopping Tips

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CACFP operators are facing various supply chain disruptions resulting in the cancellation of food deliveries, food product shortages, and increased food and supply prices. See below for suggestions for working around these challenges.



CACFP operators who typically buy food from vendors should communicate with food distributors on a regular basis to identify any emerging supply chain issues, place product orders earlier, and forecast food needs for a longer period. They may need to identify alternate sources of supplies, such as grocery stores. CACFP operators should make their best efforts to plan ahead and ask store staff when they expect to receive deliveries and restock certain items. When making a shopping list, include a list of appropriate substitutions in the event the store does not have what you need. If your program is using recipes, look for ones with ingredients that are easy to substitute. Please note that when swapping ingredients, you should verify the yield, nutrients, and meal pattern contributions to meet your intended goal for the recipe.

When a planned food item or recipe ingredient is not available, program operators are encouraged to consider **substitutions** within the same meal component. Some examples of possible substitutions are below. The [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs](#) is a useful tool for determining how foods may contribute toward the meal pattern requirements.

If this is not available...	Try this...
Whole grain-rich sliced bread	Whole grain-rich or enriched buns, pita bread, bagels, rolls, or tortillas
Brown rice	Barley, bulgur, quinoa, or enriched white rice
Fresh or frozen fruit	Canned fruit or fruit cups (packed in water, 100% juice, or light syrup) or dried fruits
Refrigerated fluid milk	Ultra-High Temperature (UHT) milk, a milk substitute that is nutritionally equivalent to cow's milk, or another creditable milk, such as buttermilk or kefir For adult participants, yogurt* instead of milk once a day.
Fresh or frozen meat	Canned chicken, tuna, salmon, or beans, dry beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, nut or seed butters, tofu or tempeh, eggs, cheese, and yogurt*
Fresh or frozen vegetables	Low or reduced-sodium canned vegetables

* All yogurts in the CACFP must contain 23 grams of total sugars or less per 6 ounces.

Shelf-Stable Options

Despite best efforts, sometimes food deliveries do not contain everything that was ordered. To limit disruptions in the meal service, CACFP operators may consider having shelf-stable options on hand to use as substitutions. Some shelf-stable options include:

Fruits: Applesauce, Dried fruits (e.g., raisins, cranberries, apricots)*; Fruit cups, shelf-stable (packed in water, 100% juice, or light syrup); Juice (100%); Many whole fruits (e.g., apples, oranges).

Vegetables: Juice (100%); Salsa cups, shelf-stable; Hummus cups, shelf-stable*.

Meats/Meat Alternates: Nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters^; Individual cans/pouches of tuna or chicken; Beef jerky or other dried, semi dried meat, poultry, or seafood*^.

Grains: Popcorn^; Whole grain-rich or enriched breads, cereals**, crackers, pretzels, or tortillas.

Milk: Milk, shelf-stable.

* A Product Formulation Statement or Child Nutrition label is needed for crediting.

^ If serving foods to children under 4 years old, avoid or modify foods that may be a choking risk, such as popcorn, dried meats, dried fruit, and nuts and seeds.

**All cereals in the CACFP must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce.