The continuation of program services in a safe, workable environment during a public health emergency is critical.

As the pandemic continues to affect the way things get done in child nutrition programs, many options for service have been considered; contingency plans have been discussed; and methods to protect health and safety have been established.
The many changes and possibilities for service have led to questions on how to keep both customers and staff safe in adapted program environments.

Here are answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).
Protecting health and safety involves not only protection of program foods, but protection of staff as well.
Is there personal safety guidance for staff working to provide meals during the pandemic response?
Yes, nonmedicinal interventions are the most important strategy to delay the spread of the virus and reduce impact of the disease. To help protect personal health and safety:

• Avoid direct contact with others and apply physical distancing strategies.
• Closely monitor personal health and stay home when sick.
• Wash hands often to reduce chance of the virus contacting the eyes, nose, or mouth.
• Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Limit use of items that may prompt touching of the face, such as facial jewelry or ill-fitting glasses.
• Follow appropriate coughing and sneezing etiquette, followed by proper handwashing.
• Wear a face covering.
Is there guidance for supervisors working to keep team members safe while they prepare and serve meals in child nutrition programs during the pandemic response?
Yes, to protect team members...

• Require and provide appropriate protective supplies.
• Use spacing strategies to create a 6-foot distance or install protective barriers at points of close contact, such as serving lines.
• Ensure effective hand hygiene is taking place and provide the resources necessary to do so.
• Screen staff prior to entering the building for the first time each day. Clearly communicate the protocol for screening and consistently implement this practice for all personnel.
• Exclude employees with symptoms of the viral infection. Ensure program staff understand they should not report to work if they are feeling ill.
• As a best practice, allow only approved personnel to enter program areas.
• Disinfect high-touch areas routinely and contamination event.
• Increase facility ventilation.
Governor Kelly’s Executive Order No.20-59 requires schools to apply commonsense mitigation strategies, including face masks, physical distancing, effective hand hygiene, daily screening to include temperature checks, and routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.


Check with County Commissioner regarding order.
Question

How can air quality and general facility ventilation be improved?
Apply strategies to decrease airborne transmission of viral agents, such as...

- Taking advantage of outdoor environments for dining as weather conditions and space allow.
- Opening screened exterior windows intermittently.
- Increasing the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the indoor ventilation system.
- Adjusting ventilation rates, installing ventilation filters, and properly maintaining ventilation and air conditioning systems.
Question

Is physical distancing required if face coverings are worn?
Yes.

• Transmission of the virus happens most frequently within about 6 feet of person-to-person contact.
• Individuals shall maintain a 6-foot distance from other individuals with only infrequent or incidental moments of close proximity.
• Executive Order NO. 20-59 mandates 6-foot social distancing throughout all public or private K-12 school buildings or facilities. Check with County Commissioner regarding order.
Question

What if a working program staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19?
Answer

• Report a diagnosis of COVID-19 or close contact with a diagnosed individual to supervisory personnel.
• Take precautionary measures as determined by local health officials which may include:
  • Guidance on what actions to take to allow the individual to return to work based on the level of transmission in the community
  • More advanced protective practices for others
  • Quarantine guidance for incidences of close contact
  • Temporary closure of facilities or cancellation of events
Question

What should a Sponsor do if there are not enough staff to provide meal services?
• Recruit volunteers to help under the direct oversight of a nutrition program staff person.
• Contact KSDE Child Nutrition & Wellness staff to see if another Sponsor can provide meals.
• Consider a plan where multiple meals are provided at a time as waivers allow.
• Provide shelf stable and convenience options to reduce demand on labor.
Can program operators enlist the help of student helpers and adult volunteers to help during meal services?
• Student helpers and adult volunteers can be part of the plan to provide meal services in the operation.

• Ensure they understand they should not help if they are feeling ill or have symptoms of concern.

• Train on precautions needed to protect program integrity and personal safety.

As a best practice, allow only program staff, custodial staff, and approved volunteers to enter program areas.
Question *

Is there any guidance regarding school organizations, such as concessions personnel, using the nutrition program kitchen after regular hours while there is a pandemic?
Answer

• As a best practice to manage risks, it is recommended that only program staff, custodial staff, and approved volunteers enter program areas.
• The decision to offer the kitchen facility for use by another organization is a local decision.
• It is a requirement to protect program foods. The nutrition program food supply would need to be secured in some way if the facility is used by nonprogram personnel.
Question

How is a determination made on whether there has been close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19?
When making a determination of staff close contact, know that...

- Close contact is currently defined as within 6 feet of a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 positive individual for 15 cumulative minutes within a 24 hour period of time.
- Close contact includes direct contact with the infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case.
- Close contact identified individuals may be required to quarantine until they have met the criteria for release as set by local health authorities.
- Short term exposure, such as walking past someone, is not considered close contact.
Question

Is there a requirement to wear a face covering in K-12 public and private schools?
The spread of COVID-19 can be significantly reduced when face coverings are used as a source control.

- The CDC and Navigating Change 2020 guide strongly recommend wearing face coverings in public settings where physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- Executive Order 20-59 Executive Order NO. 20-59 mandates face coverings for all students, faculty, staff, vendors, and other visitors to public or private K-12 school buildings or facilities, with exceptions for eating, small children, medical conditions, and certain disabilities. Check with County Commissioner regarding order.
Question

What type of face covering should be worn in a general use situation?
A mask or face covering for general use...

- Means a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is simply wrapped around the lower face.
- May be factory-made, sewn by hand, or can be improvised from household items such as scarves, bandannas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.
- Does not include surgical masks, respirators, masks with exhalation valves or masks with vents, or face shields. A face shield may be used with a face mask or in unique circumstances and should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Answer
A cloth face mask should...

- Cover the nose and below the chin
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape
Question

How should program staff protect themselves from transfer of the virus from delivered products?
Answer

- Foods and food packaging have not been identified as likely sources of COVID-19 transmission, but COVID-19 can survive on surfaces (up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel).
- As a precaution, wear single-use gloves to receive delivered products. Do not touch eyes, nose, or mouth during the unpacking process. Dispose of gloves. Wash hands.
- Do not place boxes or packages of delivered product directly on counters or other production spaces.
To protect program customers from contamination and possible illness, it is critical to prepare foods in a clean and safe environment.
Question

Is a sanitizing solution effective against corona viruses?
Answer

It depends on the chemical used to make the sanitizing solution. Most sanitizing solutions do not eliminate all traces of a virus microorganism. A sanitizing solution is appropriate for use on food-contact surfaces that are used often and undergo frequent wash, rinse, and sanitize cycles.

There are new formulations of sanitizing solutions that are effective on corona viruses and are deemed safe for use on food-contact surfaces without an additional rinse step. Check the product label for more information.
Question

What is the difference between a sanitizing solution and a disinfectant?
Answer

• Disinfectants are more effective against a broader range of viruses.
• Disinfectants are stronger solutions that can be used on high touch hard surfaces that do not come in contact with food.
• Disinfectants can be used on food-contact surfaces to more aggressively manage the spread of a viral agent or in response to a viral contamination incident. When a food-contact surface is disinfected, it must be followed by a rinse.
To disinfect a surface...

- Use a properly diluted chemical disinfecting solution (bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with 70% alcohol, and/or EPA-registered disinfectants).
- Allow the disinfectant to remain on the surface for the manufacturer’s recommended contact time.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, such as gloves and eye protection, and properly ventilate the area.
- Rinse a disinfected food-contact after the recommended contact time with the disinfectant.
Question

Is it acceptable to simply use soap and water to wash the cafeteria tables between lunch service periods on the same day?
Answer

• During meal service, wipe the tables with a dishrag held in a properly diluted sanitizing solution.
• After service, wipe with soap and hot water to dislodge food debris and viral pathogens on the table surface.
• As a best practice, follow up with a rinse and sanitize on the cafeteria tables.
Question

Is it acceptable to serve meals on reusable serviceware during the pandemic response if the serviceware is washed, rinsed, and sanitized between uses?
A traditional wash, rinse, and sanitize are acceptable for use on food-contact surfaces that are used often and undergo frequent wash, rinse, and sanitize cycles. The COVID-19 virus has a fatty outer layer that is easily dislodged with ongoing cleaning and sanitizing.

To more aggressively manage the spread of a viral agent, food-contact surfaces can also be periodically disinfected, followed by a rinse step.
Question

Can an ultraviolet disinfection lamp kill the new coronavirus?
Answer

• While a certain type of UV radiation is effective against viruses, this type of UV light can damage skin.
• If used, UV light should only be used on objects or surfaces.
• Until they develop a safe way to use UV light for people, follow other protocol to manage risks for people.
Question

Can microwaves kill the new coronavirus?
The use of microwaves is not recommended for destroying the virus, since results are inconsistent. Variables that hinder success include low frequency, low moisture, surface quality, surface texture, and positioning of the item in the microwave.
Question

Some schools are encouraging students to use personal reusable water bottles that can be filled at newly installed bottle filling stations around the school. Is it the responsibility of the nutrition program to clean, rinse, and sanitize student water bottles?
Answer

It depends!

• If the water bottles are part of the nutrition program equipment (like trays) then the nutrition program has the responsibility to wash them.
• If the water bottles belong to the students, it is their responsibility to take them home to wash them.
• If the water bottles belong to the school, but are not part of the nutrition program equipment, then, as a best practice, nutrition program staff could allow a school staff person (or responsible older properly trained student) to run them through the dishmachine at the end of the day before the machine is drained and cleaned.
Question

Is there guidance on cleaning school delivery vehicles or vehicles that deliver bundled meals to remote learning students?
Yes, here are some suggestions:

• Carry cleaning supplies and disinfectant spray or disposable wipes and a trash bag in a delivery vehicle.
• Clean and disinfect frequently touched vehicle surfaces at the beginning and end of each shift.
• Routinely clean and sanitize coolers and insulated bags used to deliver foods.
• Encourage the use of a hand sanitizer or disposable sanitizing wipes by staff delivering packaged foods.
Question *

Is there any guidance regarding cleaning and disinfecting vending machine surfaces during the pandemic?
Answer

• Vending machine surfaces would be considered a high touch nonfood-contact surface and should be periodically disinfected (can be hourly, daily, weekly as decided locally).
Preparing and Holding Foods

This pandemic has compelled us to rethink how program meals can be made available to children in a variety of learning situations.
Question

Must all program foods provided to students for take home consumption be in ready-to-eat form?
Meals served in child nutrition programs must be prepared according to State and local health and safety standards.

While the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) recommends that foods be in ready-to-eat form when made available to households as part of child nutrition program meal service during the pandemic response, KDA has determined there is no prohibition on sending home non-Ready-To-Eat (RTE) foods.

KDA strongly recommends not sending non-RTE items such as raw meats to minimize the risk of cross-contamination, as well as, food safety concerns for students who do not have the means to cook raw meat to proper end point temperatures.

If non-RTE items are sent home, they must have safe-handling, cooking and holding directions.
Question

Is there a difference between the term "precooked" and the term "fully cooked" on a product label?
Yes, here are some guidelines:

- If the product label says “precooked” there is no guarantee the product is fully cooked and ready-to-eat. Check with the manufacturer.
- If the product label says “RTE” (ready-to-eat) or “Fully Cooked”, it means the product has been sufficiently cooked and is safe to eat with no further preparation required. A RTE or fully cooked frozen product can simply be thawed for service.
Question

Are raw whole potatoes considered a ready-to-eat food?
Answer

• For people who like to eat raw potato, it can be considered a raw fresh vegetable food. Much like broccoli it can be consumed raw or cooked.
• Once peeled, a raw potato should be held cold.
Question

Can fresh fruits and vegetables be rinsed in vinegar water, soapy water, or bleach water to remove viral contaminants?
No, rinsing fruits and vegetables in soapy water or bleach solutions is not an approved practice in child nutrition programs, since it could result in chemical contamination of the foods. Rinsing fresh produce in vinegar may be effective for control of bacteria, but not viruses.

The best practices for washing fruits and vegetables has not changed.

- Use clean drinkable water to remove debris, surface pesticides, and harmful microorganisms from fresh produce.
- When handling ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables, apply the no bare hand contact rule.
Question

What are the rules for using Time as a Public Health Control for potentially hazardous foods?
Answer

• If Time as a Public Health Control is used for a cold potentially hazardous food, the food shall have an initial temperature of 41ºF or less when removed from cold holding and be served/discarded within 4 hours.

• If Time as a Public Health Control is used for a hot potentially hazardous food, the food shall be cooked to a proper internal temperature, and have an internal temperature of 135ºF or greater when removed from hot holding. The food must be served/discarded within 4 hours.
Question

Our nutrition program just purchased a bag sealing machine. Are there any special food safety concerns when using a mechanical packaging device?
Yes, there are concerns depending on the process used. Sealing and packaging of foods in a child nutrition program could involve use of Cold-Seal packaging. In child nutrition programs, Cold-Seal Packaging methods can be used for sealing...

- Shelf stable ready-to-eat foods,
- Cold, ready-to-eat potentially hazardous foods, and
- Cooked, ready-to-eat potentially hazardous foods that have been cooked to a proper internal temperature and cooled in compliance with the two-stage method of cooling before being sealed in a package or container.
Reduced Oxygen Packaging (ROP)

Sealing and packaging of foods in a child nutrition program could also involve use of Reduce Oxygen Packaging (ROP) strategies under certain strict food safety protocol.

Reduce Oxygen Packaging (ROP) strategies involve a process in which a cooked food is hot filled and sealed into impermeable packaging, creating a high risk reduced oxygen environment. Refer to SOP 26 Using Sealers/Baggers to Package Ready-to-Eat Potentially Hazardous Foods in a Child Nutrition Program to learn the protocol and determine if a variance from the Kansas Department of Agriculture is needed.
Question

Can program sites, cook, seal and hold potentially hazardous foods hot for service? Our program is considering sealing foods hot and keeping them hot until the students collect their trays to take to the classroom.
Yes, as long as the sealed hot potentially hazardous food is held at 135°F above and the seal is released before distribution to the customer.

Using Time as a Public Health Control for this situation requires an approved variance from the Kansas Department of Agriculture.
Thanks to the innovative ideas and flexibility of program staff, program meals during COVID-19 are being served in unique locations and in creative ways.
Question

Must a student’s meal tray be covered if the student takes their own meal tray from the serving area to a classroom?
Answer

There is no Kansas Food Code requirement for an individual meal tray to be covered once the customer has collected their meal and has gone by the point of sale. A student or younger child with adult oversight, is in control of their own food.

Each student could come to the serving line and collect their individual tray of food with physical distancing measures in place. The individual student could, then, take their tray of food to a classroom or other location away from the dining room with no requirement to cover the tray of food.
Question

Must a student’s meal tray be covered if a nutrition program staff person takes the food from the serving area to a classroom?
Answer

If program foods are delivered to alternate locations by nutrition program staff, then they must be packaged, covered, or protected in some manner.

It is acceptable to put meals on sheet pans on a tall rack, and to cover the tall rack with a single-use bun pan rack cover or other reusable rack cover that has been cleaned and sanitized between uses.
Question

Is there a requirement to label food items packaged by the program and offered for self-service to customers?
The Kansas Food Code has a requirement that food items, packaged on site and made available for self-service, must provide ingredient information.

Ingredient information protects the health and safety of people who experience allergic reactions to certain foods.

In schools, if the packaged menu item is handed to the child by a staff member who is familiar with the child’s dietary restrictions, the ingredient labeling is not needed.
Question *

Can we serve fruits and vegetables in foam containers with lids and allow the students to pick up their choice on their own?
You can put fruit and vegetable choices in small containers with lids for self-selection by students.

If the students cannot see what the selection is through the lid, then put up signs identifying the product. This works to protect students who have allergies from selecting something they should not have.
Question

What are some ways to create physical distancing in the serving and dining areas?
Answer

- Install physical barriers in areas where maintaining a 6-foot physical distance is difficult to achieve. There are no specifications on dimensions for the barriers, but they should provide sufficient protection and be cleanable.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on the floors or walls, to encourage individuals to remain 6 feet apart.
- Designate one way directions for traffic flow, clearly identifying entry and exit points.
- Stagger arrival and departure times within an extended meal period.
Question

Is physical distancing required while eating?
Answer

Yes, whenever possible!

- Executive Order No. 20-59 – “Throughout all public or private K-12 school buildings or facilities, individuals shall maintain a 6-foot distance from other individuals with only infrequent or incidental moments of close proximity.”

- The KSDE Navigating Change Guide also advises that program operators create a 6-foot distance when possible or install physical barriers when a 6-foot distance is not possible.
Here are some ideas for installation of partitions in the dining room. Be sure the table surfaces and reusable barrier surfaces are cleanable.
Question

What are other ways to support physical distancing during service?
Answer

- Have the children sit on one side of the tables, spaced apart.
- Use outdoor seating, if available, and when appropriate.
- Eat in the classroom.
- Extend meal periods and control the number of children dining at one time.
- Set up remote serving and dining locations.
- Alternate attendance days.
Question

What other service strategies should our program consider to keep everyone safe?
Answer

• Provide low touch service for condiments, utensils, etc.
• Pre-package grab and go meals for quick service.
• Allow preorder of meal selections to speed up service.
• Convert stationary equipment to mobile equipment with addition of wheels as a way to add service stations throughout the facility.
Question

What are some options for safely conducting point-of-sale accountability at meals?
Answer

• Check for options available through existing point of sale software.
  • For example, some software programs allow the cashier to view the children’s photos by classroom, making it easy to visually select the children who have obtained a meal when they come as a class.
• Scan an ID bar code on a provided card instead of entering pin pad numbers.
• Enter ID numbers on behalf of the students.
• Use online payment systems for meals and punch cards for a la carte to reduce handling of cash.
What happens if there is a school closure due to a high level of community or school-wide transmission of the virus?
There are possibilities that in-school learning could suspend if there is widespread transmission among students and/or staff at the school level or within the community. In the event of prolonged school closures, remote learning formats may become part of contingency planning.

- Have contingency plans in place for a variety of meal service possibilities.
- Be ready to shift program services as needed.
- Consider innovative ways to package and serve meals to remote learners.
Question

In order to offer water to on-site students at a meal during the COVID pandemic, is it acceptable for nutrition services to fill cups with water, cover the filled cups with a lid, and place them on a designated table for students to select as desired?
Answer

Yes, it is acceptable to put out covered water cups at a designated area in the cafeteria during meal service.
Question (new)

Our program is sending the next day’s breakfast home with the children as they leave school. Some children are on the bus for one hour and we are concerned about the milk staying cold.

Any suggestions?
Answer

• The milk cartons can be held separately in coolers on the bus. A plan to ensure proper meal accountability may be needed so a meal does not get disqualified due to a missing milk component.
• The milk cartons can be held in the freezer for a short time before distribution to the customer.
• The milk cartons should include instructions to refrigerate them as soon as possible.
Handling Leftover Meals / Food Donations
Question

What can be done with bundled lunches leftover from a meal service?
Answer

It depends.

• If the bundled meals are held at safe temperatures and the food has not been served, the food can be used another day.

• If Time as a Public Health Control strategies are being used, the food must be served or discarded within 4 hours of removal from temperature control.

• If a decision is made to donate the leftover food that has been safely held, then it must be transferred in accordance with state and local health codes and donated to a qualifying organization.
Question

If we serve meals in the classroom, can we save leftovers to use at a later time or must they be discarded?
Answer

- Once the foods are served to the children, they cannot be saved as leftovers, but can be put on a share table.
- If the foods were taken to the classroom, not served out, and have been kept in temperature control, then the foods can be saved.
  - For example, if individual yogurts are taken down the hall to outside a classroom, and the students come into the hallway to select their yogurt and other menu items, if 8 yogurts are not selected, and the yogurts are held cold, the yogurts can be taken back to the kitchen.
Question (new)

Are share tables an option for controlling waste during the COVID pandemic?
Answer

• In times of significant viral spread in the local community, consider discontinuing use of the share table temporarily.
• In times of low viral spread in the community, share tables may be used for unopened packaged food items that children do not consume. See SOP 23 for more information.
• Consider logistics of safely offering items from a share table to children during a viral pandemic.
  • Sanitize designated share table area between each serving group.
  • Limit the number of children going to the share table at a time.
  • If a child places an opened/exposed item on the share table, discard all items on the share table and sanitize the share table.
Question

Can Sponsors donate program foods if they will not be used in the program in a timely manner?
Yes, as part of USDA initiatives, Kansas supports donation of uneaten, wholesome foods to appropriate nonprofit institutions.

- Program foods can be donated to another local public school / center serving program meals to children during the emergency.
- Program foods can be donated to a local food pantry or other nonprofit organization (501c3), that collects and redistributes food to those in need.
- Program foods **cannot** be donated directly to children or families.
- Donated meals **cannot** be claimed for reimbursement.
- Donated food must be transferred in accordance with state and local health codes to better ensure food quality and safety.
- Document, and keep on file, the date of the donation and a list of items donated.
Question

Can Sponsors accept donation of foods and use them in the program?
Yes, USDA and the Kansas Department of Agriculture permit schools to receive donations of intact foods under certain conditions.

- Donated food must meet the same food safe conditions as food offered for sale.
- Foods, donated to the program, cannot be prepared foods.
- Foods, donated to the program, must come from commercial suppliers/licensed food establishments under regulatory control. Controlled processing and post processing handling are required for the safe distribution of donated food.
- Foods, donated to the program, can be used as part of a reimbursable meal.
- Foods **cannot** be accepted from home kitchens. Home kitchens and other similar environments allow open access to many people and are frequently implicated in the microbial contamination of food.
- Parents may not purchase or donate foods on behalf of the Sponsor. There is no guarantee of safe food handling.
Question

If the Sponsor has contracted with a Food Service Management Company, can food donations be accepted for use in the program?
If the program site is operated by a Food Service Management Company, in a fixed price contract, the Sponsor pays a set price regardless of donations being received and/or not received by the FSMC. As the FSMC is a private identity, how they procure and/or receive donated items to prepare their meals may or not be in the Sponsor/FSMC contract.
Because there will continue to be new information regarding COVID-19, recommendations from national, state and local agencies will continue to evolve. Work with local health departments and local stakeholders to ensure protocols align with the most current scientific knowledge and are responsive to changing conditions at the local level.
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1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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