

National School Lunch Program Frequently Asked Questions

Many of our families have been displaced from their home by flooding. Are these students considered homeless?

Children living in or evacuated from disaster areas may be determined homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Program regulations define a homeless child as “a child identified as lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.” Consistent with current Program policy, this may also include children temporarily residing with another household. These children are categorically eligible for free meals in the National School Lunch/Breakfast Program.

How long must a family be displaced in order to be considered homeless?

If the student is displaced from their home there is no time requirement. They can immediately be classified as homeless and due to that status they will be eligible for free school meals without filling out any F/R lunch paperwork. Federal law indicates that students displaced by a natural disaster, even for a short period of time, this includes students who are “doubled-up” with friends or family because of the flood, can be verified as homeless.

What does the school need in order to provide free meals to these students?

Eligibility may be established through various methods:

- a. A list of all children determined homeless due to the disaster provided to the Local Education Agency by:
 1. The district’s homeless liaison;
 2. An organization assisting evacuees; OR
 3. A homeless shelter representative.
- b. An application indicating the child is homeless completed by:
 1. An adult living with the child; OR
 2. A school official.

Can households that take in other family members displaced because of flooding receive meal benefits?

In situations where a household from a designated disaster area moves in with another household, the host family may submit a meal application that includes the displaced family members and any income provided to them when applying for free or reduced price meals. The application is reviewed by school officials and eligibility determined for the host family based on the combined number of household members and income. The students of the displaced family automatically qualifies for free meal benefits.

How long can affected students receive meal benefits?

Children certified for free or reduced price meal benefits because of a disaster maintain eligibility for the entire school year and up to 30 operating days in the next school year.

Our district is scheduled for an Administrative Review this school year, can this be postponed?

The State agency has the discretion to move an Administrative Review to a different year of the three-year cycle, provided the School Food Authority has a review within four years of its last Administrative Review. Contact the Nebraska Department of Education Nutrition Services (NDE) if you would like to request a change.

Delivery and service of food has been impacted and the school may not receive items needed to meet meal pattern requirements. Will the district be reimbursed for the meals served?

If emergency conditions exist that prevents schools from obtaining fluid milk, the State agency may allow service of meals without milk or with an alternate form of milk, such as canned or dry milk.

USDA Regional Office approval is needed in order for school meal programs to serve meals that do not meet the menu planning or meal pattern requirements in disaster situations. Therefore, if changes to other meal component requirements are needed, schools should consult the Nebraska Department of Education Nutrition Services.

Flexibility is allowed with regard to time of meal service and use of offer versus serve. These modifications may be made with State agency approval.

Our school lunch records have been lost or damaged because of flooding. What will happen if the district no longer has documentation to support meal service?

When records for review purposes, such as paid claims, approved applications, and production records are destroyed, School Food Authorities should inform NDE of the circumstances, dates of the losses, and the types and approximate age of the records that were lost. NDE will note the loss of records for the purpose of future administrative reviews and audits.

If a household is not homeless but receives Disaster Benefits from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP), do they automatically qualify for free meals?

Yes, children in households receiving D-SNAP benefits are categorically eligible for free school meals. Certification of these children may be accomplished through direct contact with the SNAP agency or by an application submitted by a household with a case number.

Contact information:

Nebraska Department of Education
Office of Nutrition Services
402-471-2488 or 800-731-2233
nde.nsweb@nebraska.gov