



Field Trip Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

This document provides guidance for School Food Authorities (SFAs) on the USDA's requirements for field trips and how to avoid compliance issues.

Availability of Field Trip Meals

School Food Authorities may choose whether to offer portable field trip meals for students. If offered, field trip meals must be available to all students, regardless of eligibility for free, reduced-price, or paid meals; and must be offered at regular meal prices. School food service operations offer meals to students on field trips to maintain a steady revenue stream and as a great convenience to busy parents. Fewer student meals affects the funding schools receive in student payments, federal reimbursement, state match payment, and commodity allocations. This loss of revenue can add up over the course of the school year. In addition, it is difficult for school food service operations to appropriately adjust labor hours when there are occasional dips in participation, which may negatively affect productivity.

SFAs should be aware of students with special dietary needs (such as food allergies) who request field trip meals. Field trip meals may require collaborative planning with school food service staff, the school nurse, and the child's parents or guardians to identify meal modifications that meet the child's dietary needs and comply with the food safety requirements for off-site meals.



Overview of Requirements for Reimbursable Field Trip Meals

Field trip meals must meet the criteria below to qualify for NSLP and SBP reimbursement.

1. Field trip meals must meet the meal pattern requirements for the appropriate grade group. For more information, refer to [Meal Pattern requirements](#) on the OPI's webpage.
2. SFAs must record field trip meals on the school's daily food production record.
3. Field trip lunches must be served between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Field trip breakfasts must be served at or close to the beginning of the child's day at school per regulations [7 CFR 2010.10\(1\)](#) and [7 CFR 220.8\(l\)](#).
4. SFAs must develop a local process to accurately count meals served during field trips. Field trip staff must conduct Point of Sale/Service (POS) meal counts for field trip meals. For more information, refer to [Meal Counts and Claims](#) on OPI's website.
5. School food service staff and field trip staff (such as teachers, teacher aides, other school staff, parents, and volunteers) must follow appropriate food safety practices for field trip meals. For more information, refer to USDA Food Safety regulations ([7 CFR 210.139C](#))).

Meal Counts

The USDA requires that NSLP and SBP meal counts for all grades must be determined at the POS. For field trips, the POS is the point in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that they have served all required components for a reimbursable meal to the child.

Acceptable POS Meal Count Procedures

- The teacher supervising the field trip has an attendance roster of all the students on the field trip. During mealtime at the field trip site, the teacher checks off the student's name after verifying that the student received all of the components for a reimbursable meal. The teacher returns the completed student roster to the cafeteria after the field trip, and the cafeteria manager reviews the information by comparing meal counts to the number of leftover meals. **Note: The number of leftovers CANNOT be used to determine the field trip meal count. Instead, it is used to compare the recorded field trip meal counts by staff and determine any meal count clarification that may need to take place.**

- Students come through the cafeteria serving line and purchase a bag meal at the POS prior to leaving for the field trip. Bag meals that contain potentially hazardous foods (PHFs) are stored in a transport container that can maintain temperatures at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Milk choices are transported separately in a container that can maintain temperatures at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Milk must be provided with the other meal items.

Staff Training

SFAs must provide appropriate job-specific training for all employees, including non-food service staff, whose responsibilities include duties related to the operation of school nutrition programs. For example, teachers and other applicable staff who conduct field trip meal counts must receive appropriate training to ensure they perform their jobs effectively and in compliance with the USDA's regulations.

In addition, the USDA requires annual civil rights training for all staff who interact with the NSLP and SBP, including staff involved in field trips meal. More information on [Civil Rights requirements and Training](#) can be found on OPI's webpage.

Food Safety

Field trip meals must comply with HACCP procedures. The greatest food safety concern for field trip meals is ensuring that Potential Hazardous Foods (PHFs) stay at proper temperature during transportation and service. PHFs include milk and milk products; meat; fish; cut melons; cut tomatoes; cut leafy greens; baked potatoes; cooked rice; beans; vegetables; and tofu or other soy proteins.

School food service staff and field trip staff must work together to ensure that field trip meals are safe to eat. The following practices help to ensure the safety of field trip meals.



Meal Preparation

- Ensure that school food service staff follow all applicable HACCP procedures during the preparation and storage of field trip meals.
- Chill foods that will be served cold before placing in transport containers. Examples include sandwiches (e.g., turkey, ham, roast beef, tuna salad), cut fruit and vegetables, especially melons tomatoes, and leafy greens (excludes whole fruit and pre- packaged, shelf-stable fruit such as fruit cups and applesauce), and dairy products (e.g., milk, cheese, and yogurt).
- If the transport container cannot maintain milk at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit, use shelf-stable (aseptic) milk that does not require refrigeration.

Meal Transport

- Maintain PHFs at appropriate temperatures during transport and storage. Ensure that cold foods are kept at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Hot foods must be kept at or above 135 degrees Fahrenheit. For more information, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN's) sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), [Hot and Cold Holding for Time Temperature Control for Safe Foods](#).
- Transport PHFs in insulated portable food transport containers, such as coolers. Clean and sanitize transport containers before use. Use ice or cold packs to maintain the temperature of PHFs. Keep the containers tightly closed until meals are distributed. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Transporting Food to Remote Sites \(Satellite Kitchens\)](#).
- Store transport containers and food out of direct sunlight and away from engines. Meal service.
- Ensure students eat meals at the appropriate time to ensure correct implementation of time and temperature controls for food safety.
- Wash hands prior to distributing meals. Alcohol- based hand sanitizer is not a suitable substitute for handwashing because it is not effective against foodborne illnesses and allergens. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Washing Hands](#).

- Use disposable gloves or utensils when distributing any unwrapped or unpackaged ready-to-serve foods, such as whole pieces of fresh fruit or sandwiches packaged in bulk containers. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Using Suitable Utensils When Handling Ready-to-Eat Foods](#).
- Have students thoroughly wash their hands before receiving meals and eating. To avoid potential allergic reactions, ask students not to share foods.
- Discard all leftover food items returned in coolers from the field trip.

Best Practices

The Montana Office of Public Instruction strongly recommends the following practices to ensure compliance with the USDA's requirements for field trip meals in the NSLP and SBP.

- Develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that includes clear written procedures regarding the requirements for field trip meals. The SOP should address:
 - how students provide field trip order to the cafeteria;
 - appropriate food safety procedures for preparing, transporting, storing and serving field trip meals, including temperature control, handwashing, and proper food handling procedures;
 - how to identify a reimbursable meal;
 - instructions for conducting field trip POS meal counts;
 - how to handle left over meals or foods (including milk); and
 - a plan for informing substitutes of the requirements for field trip meals.
- Distribute the district's SOP for field trip meals to food service staff and all applicable field trip staff, including teachers, teacher aids, other school staff, parents, and volunteers; and post on the SFA's website.
- Provide regular training (at least annually) for all food service and non-food service staff involved with field trip meals.
- Include POS meal count instructions for field trip staff with the delivery of the field trip meals. For example, SFAs could laminate the meal count instructions and attach to the food transport containers.
- Use clear signage on the transport containers to help field trip staff identify the required meal components, refer to [Signage to Identify Reimbursable Meals](#) found on OPI's website.
- Reinforce proper procedure for field trip meals through various communication channels, such as staff meetings, e-mails, employee handbooks, written instructions, and the SFA's website.

