

Providing Meals for School Children

This is a social activity for parents and children.

Background

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many schools are closing. This presents significant problems for families in poverty who receive free school meals, since they no longer have the means to feed their children properly.

This is a guide is for schools who want to continue to provide meals for the children during the crisis, and who do not have the funds or means to buy in the meals. It proposes the model we have used for years at Foodshare to draw on the support of parents or other trusted volunteers.

These protocols apply equally to provision of meals to anyone who needs support, such as people who are homeless, in poverty, elderly, or simply lonely. So if your school finds it has more volunteers than needed internally, the project can expand beyond the school walls.

Outline

The key objective of this initiative is to ensure nutritious food is prepared safely, to appropriate food hygiene standards and distributed in a way that is safe, both from the COVID-19 and food hygiene perspectives.

Parents or other trusted volunteers comply with written standards to cook meals at home. The standards set out minimum hygiene procedures to minimise the risk of spread of disease. Meals are packaged in individual containers and brought to the school. The meals are collected by families on free school meals and taken home to eat.

The cost of the meals is borne either by the cook, with or without the help of friends, or with funds raised by the school for the purpose.

The protocols should be adapted by schools to meet their particular circumstances. For example, the protocols require that food is cooked and distributed on the same day to avoid spoilage. Some schools may have freezing facilities which open up the opportunity to build up food donations before distribution, for example to people in the community.

This Guide

This guide sets out information/protocols for:

- schools
- cooks
- volunteers who distribute food
- administrators (including fundraising suggestions)

Further Information

Schools who have particular circumstances for which they seek support can email us at: nigel@foodshare.today . Our ability to respond depends on the nature of your enquiry and the volume of enquiries we have. Please only get in touch where absolutely necessary.

The guide is provided free for schools. It is developed by unpaid charity members. Schools looking for information or clarity on their legal obligations should seek appropriate professional advice. They should not rely on this document as providing legal or financial advice.

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Guide for Schools

Getting Started

Let parents and carers know about the scheme to provide school meals whilst the school is closed. Ask parents to offer support as:

- cooks
- volunteers to distribute the food
- administrators (some schools will prefer to do the administration themselves to achieve greater assurance that the standards are being properly applied)
- monetary donors

Children are both welcome and strongly encouraged to help cook the meals, providing the parent ensures that their assistant cooks follow the hygiene routine rigorously.

Notes re Cooks

You must check that cooks have completed an appropriate Level 2 food hygiene course. Parents who do not have the certification can take a short online food hygiene course which is simple and based largely on common sense. Two example of many approved courses available are:

<https://www.food-hygiene-certificate.co.uk/food-hygiene-level-2-catering.aspx>

<https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/courses/food-and-drink/level-2-catering>

Once a parent is accepted to the scheme as a cook, you should agree with them what meals to cook. Examples of recipes for larger numbers of people used at Foodshare over the years can be found here:

https://apps.foodshare.today/homeless/freezermeals/display_recipies/

Before you accept anyone as a cook, you must know who the parents are, have their contact details and be satisfied that they will follow the procedures rigorously.

In our non-school setting, we have found the most reliable system is for parents to cook on a regular day of the week, and not take on too much. For example, cook on every Monday, or every other Thursday. We have found that cooks who take on more heavy commitments may find it difficult to meet those commitments.

Notes re Distributing Volunteers

The role of volunteers who distribute food is to supervise the pick-up by parents. It is best to have two people, one of whom is clearly designated as the supervisors. Their primary role is to ensure food is laid out correctly, picked-up by parents quickly, ensure people do not congregate and clear up once the collection-time ends. The supervisor needs to send expense claims to the Administrators.

Notes re Administrators

Many schools will carry out this function themselves. The role of the Administrator is to make sure cooks and volunteers are properly coordinated so that everything is ready for parents to pick-up food at the allotted time. They also need to manage donated funds and reimburse expenses to cooks who ask for reimbursement. This financial function may be best carried out by someone other than the people administering the rota.

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Notes re Funding

Each school will have their own way of handling funding. Here is a suggestion based on our experience in Maidenhead.

Cooks may choose to pay for the ingredients themselves. Others will not. You are likely to get the greatest number of cooks if you can allow parents to choose for themselves whether to claim expenses without judgement or awkwardness. We have found the reimbursement procedure these guides suggest is suitable.

You have the option of asking parents to donate to a fund specifically to pay for this initiative. If you are able to ring-fence the funds, parents will be more willing to donate. You also have the option of asking the wider community to donate also.

Our experience in Maidenhead is that between 15-30% of cooks will claim for their expenses. But it will vary enormously in different parts of the country. We also find that we are over-funded whenever we ask for donations – but that is in relatively affluent Maidenhead and pre COVID-19. The school can limit the number of meals it makes available depending on the level of funding.

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Guide for Cooks

Before volunteering, you must take a short online food hygiene course (Level 2) and pass the simple, largely common sense test. Two example of many approved courses available are:

<https://www.food-hygiene-certificate.co.uk/food-hygiene-level-2-catering.aspx>

<https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/courses/food-and-drink/level-2-catering>

1. Do not cook if you feel ill or have any symptoms of the Coronavirus, such as headache, fever or dry cough.
2. Agree with the school what meals to cook and when the meals can be delivered. Do not start cooking until you know what times you can take the meals to the school. Examples of recipes for larger numbers of people used at Foodshare over the years can be found here:
https://apps.foodshare.today/homeless/freezermeals/display_recipies/
- To ensure food does not have a chance to get spoilt, always cook the food and deliver the food to the school on the same day.
3. Before starting, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.
4. All cooking surfaces must be cleaned with a sanitiser twice. Once to remove dirt, grease and food, the second time to disinfect the surface. An example of how to do it can be found here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRh1N1My4GY>
5. Follow the cooking procedures set out in the food hygiene course.
6. Write out the ingredients used in the meal either on a sheet of paper or on a label that can be attached to the container. Write the date of cooking on the sheet/label. Highlight any allergen's used in cooking. A list of allergens that need to be highlit can be found here:
<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/allergy-and-intolerance>
7. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.
8. Wash all utensils to be used to pack the food into containers.
9. Fill food into waterproof, disposable containers, up to around 90% full. If the container is over-filled, it may leak or cause problems for the families reheating the food.
10. Stack the containers ready to take to the school. Do not store them for more than one hour before taking them to the school.
11. Wash your hands before taking the containers to the school at the agreed time. Remember to take the ingredients sheet if not using labels.
12. Where the cost of the meal will be reimbursed, take your receipts with the food, remembering to write your name, your contact details (phone number/email address) and total amount to be reimbursed.
13. When you get home, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.

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Guide for Administrators

Rota

1. Arrange a schedule of cooks. Make sure the cooks know about the guide they should follow, how many people to cook for and where and when they need to deliver the food. All cooks should send you evidence of their successful completion of their Level 2 Hygiene qualification before they can cook.
2. Arrange a schedule of at least two volunteers to supervise the food pick-up. Designate one volunteer as the supervisor.
3. Arrange for parents who you decide to support to collect food at pre-set times. If they are ill or self-isolating, set up a system to deliver food if appropriate.
4. Ideally, try to schedule a rota where parents have a fixed schedule – such as every Monday, every other Tuesday or the third Friday of each month. This will make it easier to control and give parents the opportunity to schedule their volunteering commitments well in advance.

Finances

1. Arrange a ring-fenced fund for monetary donations. Make sure you know how much funds are available at any one time.
2. If there are not enough funds in place, you will need to reduce the number of days food can be provided.
3. Some cooks will ask for reimbursement of their expenses. Make sure you contact each cook who asks before making the first reimbursement to check their bank details in person. Unless you know the parents personally, make sure you use contact details in the school's records, not the contact details provided on the expense claim.
4. Unless arranged otherwise, use the school's normal system to authorise payments to cooks from the ring-fenced funds.

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Guide for volunteers

1. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. Throughout the session, do not stand closer than an arms length from anyone else.
2. Put tables somewhere outside. All surfaces must be cleaned with a sanitiser twice. Once to remove dirt, grease and food, the second time to disinfect the surface. An example of how to do it can be found here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRh1N1My4GY>

3. When they arrive, ask the cooks to sign a sheet confirming they have no symptoms of Coronavirus, have complied with the guidance, written out the ingredients and highlight the allergens.

If you have any concerns whatsoever, the food should not be distributed. Let the administrators know so they can decide whether to reschedule or remove the cooks from the rota.

4. Providing the cooks have complied with the guide, ask them to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds. Then ask them to put their food containers directly on the tables, unstacked, so that parents can pick food up without touching other people's containers. Do not touch the containers yourself to avoid the risk of contamination. If you need to touch them for any reason, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds first.
5. Make sure the meal containers either have a label attached or the written list of ingredients is placed beside the food. If the cooks include their receipts/reimbursement requests, put them somewhere safe
6. When parents come to pick up food, draw their attention to the ingredients and allergens and ask them to take food and leave immediately. You want to discourage parents from congregating to mixing together, or their children playing together. Let parents know that we ask people to take the food and leave immediately to protect them, other families picking up food and the volunteers. But providing the parents to not stand in front of the tables, it is not your job to stop parents/children from socialising.
7. When all the food is distributed, wash your hands for 20 seconds, then sanitise the tables as above and put the tables away. Then wash your hands again.
8. When you get home, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.

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Guide for Parents

1. If you are feeling ill or self-isolating, ask someone to pick up the food for you, to avoid either passing on any virus or picking one up.
2. The school will arrange a time for you to pick up the food. When you come to pick up the food, please pick it up and leave immediately. Do not stand closer than an arm's length from anyone throughout the pick-up. This will reduce the risk of cross-contamination.
3. Before you leave with the food, note the ingredients and any food allergens that will be listed on or besides the food.
4. When you get home, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds and wash the food container to kill any virus that may be lying on the outside before storing/cooking the food.
5. Eat the food on the day you receive it to avoid the possibility of it going off.