Responding to an Emergency

A Guide for Food Banks and School Meal Programs

This guide aims to help prepare multisector actors to address the food security and nutrition needs of children during periods of extended or intermittent school closure due to a pandemic or other emergency.

The **Global** **FoodBanking** Network®

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Partnering to support child nutrition

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) and The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) forged a partnership to better support children's food and nutrition needs and fight rising levels of food insecurity and hunger. The partnership provides technical support to food banking organizations in more than 40 countries that are on the frontlines of increasing food access for vulnerable children.

To further mobilize school feeding practitioners, food banks, and other partners to tackle child hunger amid COVID-19 or similar large-scale public health emergencies, GCNF and GFN aggregated resources from partners who are responding to the food and nutrition needs of children during school closures and as schools reopen.

The Global Child Nutrition Foundation

Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) works with a committed community of governments, civil society, and the private sector to ensure that hunger is not a barrier to learning for any child. Together we advocate for school feeding programs as a powerful investment in every child's human capital; share innovations, challenges, and lessons learned among our peers; and provide support through forging valuable partnerships and connecting resources to meet the needs of our network members.

The Global FoodBanking Network

The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) supports community-driven solutions to alleviate hunger in more than 40 countries. While millions struggle to access enough safe and nutritious food, nearly a third of all food produced is lost or wasted. We're changing that. We believe food banks directed by local leaders are key to achieving Zero Hunger and building resilient food systems. For more information, visit *foodbanking.org.*

Acknowledgments

In this guide

This guide aims to help multisector actors to address the food security and nutrition needs of children during periods of extended or intermittent school closure due to a pandemic or other emergency. The collaboration of schools and food banks in this effort is the primary focus.

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A boy sits with his mom, enjoying the foods he received in the summer food pack provided by Feed Nova Scotia, as part of Food Banks Canada's After the Bell program. *(Photo: Feed Nova Scotia)*

Introduction

SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS (SFPs) are a powerful tool to combat child malnutrition, support education, foster sustainable food systems, alleviate rural poverty, and enhance gender equity. Governments around the world are implementing SFPs to realize these benefits. Food banks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community-led initiatives are playing an important and growing role in their delivery.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented threat to SFPs and the progress that had been made in recent decades to reach more children with school meals. Border closures and social distancing measures disrupted food systems around the world, exposing vulnerabilities and enhancing risk factors for malnutrition. Widespread school closures hindered not only children's education but their access to vital health and nutrition services. At the height of the pandemic, an estimated 1.6 billion children were out of school,

and 370 million children in 150 countries were not receiving school meals.[1] The global socioeconomic crisis also threatened to push 142 million more children into monetary poor households, bringing the global total to 725 million children.[2] The COVID-19 pandemic increased food insecurity to its highest level in decades. While no one was left untouched by the pandemic, those already vulnerable to malnutrition and poverty were the hardest hit by its widespread consequences.

Yet the crisis also provided many important lessons and inspiring examples. Communities, schools, NGOs, governments, and private-sector actors came together in innovative ways to address gaps and enhance the resilience of food systems. In response to school closures, these diverse actors employed resourcefulness, collaboration, and new modalities to ensure children received vital support for nutrition and well-being.

Developing an emergency response plan

AN IMPORTANT COLLABORATION that emerged during the pandemic response was between food banks and schools. These powerful partnerships capitalized on different institutional strengths, leveraged joint procurement strategies, and shared resources and technical expertise. Through these efforts, schools and food banks were able to pivot quickly to sustain food assistance and, in some cases, expand coverage of SFPs to reach children in need.

In times of emergency, fast and coordinated action is essential to minimize the negative impacts of school closures. Schools and food banks are uniquely positioned to ensure children receive the food they need, when and where they need it.

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread consequences presented unique operational challenges that required different approaches and solutions. As a result, many international, national, and local stakeholders involved in school meal programs updated their guidance and protocols to enhance emergency preparedness and ensure the delivery of safe, nutritious food in times of school closures, breakdowns in the food supply chains, and social distancing requirements.

Food bank–led SFPs can apply these lessons to effectively respond to the food security and nutrition needs of children during present or future public health crises.[3] Prior planning and partnerships with

governments, schools, food banks, and other entities will be crucial for successful emergency preparedness and response plans.[4]

GCNF and GFN, with the support of their school nutrition and food bank partners, have collated resources and captured the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic within this guide. The guide outlines six steps for developing or reviewing emergency preparedness and emergency response plans. Its focus areas include nutrition, food safety, local supply chains, and gender equity.

Who is this guide designed for?

THIS GUIDE TRANSLATES existing wisdom in emergency preparedness and the knowledge and lessons gained during the COVID-19 pandemic into actionable steps for food banks that either implement SFPs or are interested in assisting in child-focused emergency response efforts. This guide can also benefit interested schools, NGOs, and community-led initiatives. It will enable SFP actors to take proactive action to ensure SFPs continue during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and are prepared for future public health crises and emergency situations that result in school closures.

As with all guidance, it must be carefully considered whether it applies to a specific context. Additionally, guidance for managing emergency situations such as a global pandemic is regularly evolving. Thus, it is important to review new information as it becomes available and incorporate it into your plans.

A *child-centered approach to food security and nutrition*

A child-centered food system makes healthy diets accessible to children in the context of their lives. It ensures healthy diets are not just available but also affordable, appealing, and aspirational.[5] Emergency situations can interrupt all aspects of food systems and threaten these goals. That is why emergency school feeding programs are an essential part of supporting children's access to healthy diets. This guide aims to help prepare multisector actors to address the food security and nutrition needs of children during periods of extended or intermittent school closures due to a pandemic or other widespread public health emergency. The primary focus in this effort is widespread collaboration between schools and food banks.

A child holds a plate of food provided by Mesa Brasil SESC at The Association Casa de Acolhimento Lar Maanaim, an organization that serves children and youth in Guarujá, Brazil. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Carlos Macedo)*

How to use the guide

This guide takes you through six steps for developing an emergency response plan for an SFP. Throughout the guide are boxes with important information and insights as well as country

examples that illustrate the strength and creativity that can emerge from strong partnerships. The guide also provides a library of technical resources to further assist with specific aspects of your emergency response planning. It complements the _Developing a School Feeding Program guide_, which was also developed by GFN and GCNF.

An overview of school feeding programs

School feeding programs (SFPs) are increasingly popular around the world and take on many different designs and formats to provide students with snacks, meals, or other foods either in or through schools. SFPs are transformative human capital investments because they help children grow to fulfill their potential as healthy, skilled, productive adults. Well-designed and multicomponent SFPs are a powerful tool to combat hunger, improve educational outcomes, address micronutrient deficiencies and obesity in vulnerable children, support sustainable food systems, and promote gender equity. Most governments also consider national SFPs as a stimulus for agricultural productivity and economic development, especially when linked to local and smallholder agricultural production (i.e., the Home-Grown School Feeding approach, or HGSF). HGSF programs can "improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and local communities and strengthen the nexus among nutrition, agriculture, and social protection."[6]

The 2019 GCNF Global Survey of School Meal Programs © identified active SFPs in 85 countries that reach an estimated 297 million children. Of these programs, 82 percent served school lunches and 40 percent served breakfast. In 2019, 64 percent of these countries reported experiencing an emergency over the past year (such as natural disasters, conflicts, and extreme weather events), and in 33 percent of these countries, the emergency caused a decline in the number of children receiving school meals.

The role of food banks
Many food banks around the world operate targeted child hunger programs, including SFPs. In 2020, 38 GFN partner food banks implemented targeted child hunger programs for school-age children, which included school meals (breakfast and lunch), take-home rations for weekends and school breaks, and nutrition education. Thanks in part to these programs, 17.6 million children received meals from GFN partner food banks in 2020.

Food banks are well positioned to help address child hunger, particularly in crisis situations. However, 74 percent of GFN partner food banks report funding as a barrier, and 54 percent report specific food procurement as a barrier to establishing child feeding programs. Such obstacles mean that food banks are underequipped to respond to ongoing child hunger.

GFN and GCNF recently partnered to create the _Developing a School Feeding Program guide_ to support food banks around the world in their efforts to develop and expand impactful SFPs.

The targeted programs implemented include:

| School breakfast programs | School lunch programs | Backpack programs or weekend take-home rations | Summer or holiday food programs | Food and nutrition education programs |

A Tkiyet Um Ali food bank staff member holds a food parcel to distribute to families living in extreme poverty in Amman, Jordan. *(Photo: Tkiyet Um Ali)*

Step 1: Establish an internal planning committee

THE FIRST STEP of developing an emergency response plan (ERP) is allocating a staff member or dedicated team within your organization to be responsible for it. To ensure continuity, this same person/team should oversee the plan's implementation at the onset of an emergency. This will create a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities and ensure stakeholders know exactly who to contact in relation to both the plan and its implementation—enhancing communication, coordination, and impact.

As your ERP develops, you may also want to join an existing emergency response committee with wider stakeholders or create one. Identifying existing committees is part of the stakeholder outreach and data collection discussed in steps 2 and 3. When creating a stakeholder committee, it is important to establish clear channels, contacts, and timelines for communication both outside of and during emergencies.

Community members receive meal kits provided by Feeding India's Feed the Daily Wager program, which serves those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in New Delhi. *(Photo: Feeding India)*

Step 2: Map out stakeholders and begin outreach

ONCE YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED an internal team to lead your ERP development or refinement, conducting a stakeholder mapping exercise can help start your data collection and review process. The complex demands that emergencies and SFPs create mean there are many stakeholders to consider within your ERP development. This step and step 3 on data collection and review will likely evolve together as you simultaneously identify new stakeholders and relevant information to leverage joint operations.

Stakeholders may include:

- Clients (children, families, communities, and institutions) partaking in your SFP/food assistance program

- Schools (e.g., via their emergency contacts, teachers, and administrators involved in SFPs)

- Existing and potential donors of food and funding

- Local farmers and food producers

- Partners for food transportation, distribution, preparation, and logistics

- Civil society and aid organizations active in emergency response, food assistance, and social protection

> **The complex demands that emergencies and SFPs create mean there are many stakeholders to consider within your ERP development.**

As part of the school breakfast program implemented by Desarrollo en Movimiento, a boy eats empanadas at Mano Amiga in Santa Catarina Pinula, Guatemala. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Claudio Vasquez Bianchi)*

- Local experts, nutritionists, and public health experts or institutions active in school feeding or emergency food assistance

- Relevant contacts of emergency response units, including the Global Education Cluster and/or the Global Food Security Cluster[7] in your country/region

- Local and national government representatives in education, school feeding, transport, and emergency response

It is crucial to ensure fast, cohesive, and targeted action during the period of confusion that often occurs in the initial days of an emergency situation. To this end, effective planning and stakeholder engagement prior to an emergency are essential.

Important note: Wherever possible, create joint ERPs to avoid disjointed or duplicated efforts and to enhance program reach by leveraging each partner's strengths. This could involve expanding your own ERP to become a collective ERP for involved stakeholders, or it may mean tailoring your ERP to comply with and complement existing ERPs in schools and local or national government SFPs.

A boy and his grandmother choose food to take home from Mesa Brasil SESC in São Paulo, Brazil.
(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Carlos Macedo)

Step 3: Collect and review data

ACCURATE DATA IS ESSENTIAL to inform your ERP and monitor its implementation. This section provides suggested indicators to use in your data collection. These indicators line up with the suggested sections to include in your ERP as outlined in step 4. This information can be collected through desk-based research as well as interviews, meetings, and surveys with relevant stakeholders.

You can find more tools and resources to assist in the process under "Technical resources for preparing for and responding to an emergency" in the Resource library in Annex 2.

Emergency risks

- Identify the types of emergencies that are the greatest risk in your target area to tailor your ERP. This could include natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, flooding, volcanic eruptions, and other extreme weather events), conflict and political upheaval, or health outbreaks. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that all ERPs should include plans for school closures and social distancing measures. Your context may require developing an ERP that can be adapted to multiple emergency situations. It is good practice to identify the early warning signs of emergencies so emergency procedures can be enacted as soon as needed.

Existing SFP/child hunger program details

- Collect details from your food bank–led SFP or child hunger program, including the number and location of children reached, key stakeholders, emergency contacts for schools, and food safety protocols. Be sure to include how the safety protocols need to be adapted for emergency provision using the parameters such as those detailed in the "Safe food distribution guide for food banks and schools" (Annex 5).

- Gather details of partner- and government-led SFPs, social safety net programs, and child hunger programs, including their reach, location, key contacts, and emergency response experiences, procedures, and plans. It is important to incorporate the ERPs of national SFPs and others into your own ERP to ensure cohesive and complementary action.

- Document coverage gaps by identifying the number and location of vulnerable children who are not currently reached by your country's existing social safety net programs and how your program can support and supplement these programs to reach them (considering location, ethnicity, age, and gender) during an emergency.

Intended beneficiary characteristics

- Collect information on school capacities and resources for feeding children during emergencies, including the number of children and emergency contacts, using the "School and food bank capacities and resources for feeding children during emergencies" form (Annex 4).

- Document household characteristics, including transport, storage, refrigeration, and cooking as well as common challenges during emergencies such as flooding and electricity or water shortages to establish the feasibility of safely preparing take-home rations.

- List the existing nutritional needs of children and predicted risks if supply chains are disrupted, including gender considerations (see box on pages 19 and 20).

- Assess the potential for expanding coverage to reach out-of-school children, children with special access needs, and children under age 5. Extending coverage to out-of-school children and preschoolers during an emergency supports the objective of reaching the most vulnerable children. Reaching children under 5 may also help relieve the burden on older school-age children who must care for their younger siblings. Support for these age groups should be considered in relation to other active emergency food security programs at the household level.[8]

Nutrition considerations

- Document priority nutrition concerns in the area such as childhood underweight, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies—including gender-related risks of malnutrition (e.g., cultural practices around serving food, anemia rates in girls).

- Gather data on access to nutritious foods and threats to this during emergencies, including access to clean drinking water and the potential of biofortified/fortified foods and locally sourced fresh fruits and vegetables.

Note: For more information on assessing the nutrition status and local food system opportunities, see the Developing a School Feeding Program *guide, the box on pages 17 and 18, and the Resource library in Annex 2.*

Food safety considerations

- Document existing procurement, food safety management, and distribution protocols and how to ensure they continue or are appropriately adapted during an emergency.

- Document existing resources in schools, community organizations, and households, including refrigeration, storage, and clean water access.

- Note food safety issues that have arisen in past emergencies and how these risks can be mitigated.

Identification and evaluation of potential food provision sites and methods

- Explore lessons from COVID-19, including local food shortages, transportation capabilities, emergency food distribution procedures, and logistics.

Students from Brilliant Angels Education Centre in Nairobi carry food provided by Food Banking Kenya. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Brian Otieno)*

- Review the feasibility of bulk food procurement and storage resources that schools and food banks have used in past emergencies. Joint food procurement actions can help streamline communications, monitor availability, and coordinate transport of food supplies within the affected area. They may also improve economies of scale, reduce competition between entities for access to food, and/or mitigate price spikes. However, decentralized food procurement and preparation may better suit your context. It can help you maintain and expand links with smallholder farmers for the provision of fresh foods and shorten food supply chains in case of movement restrictions.

- Identify safe potential distribution points such as schools, child-friendly spaces, or women's centers away from crowded areas like markets or hospitals. If food is collected from schools or other safe spaces, ensure the collection site can accommodate traffic (by foot or car) to maintain social distancing protocols, provide efficient distribution, and guarantee appropriate recordkeeping. Also consider the weight and packaging that may be needed for food depending on whether beneficiaries are walking, driving, or taking public transportation. Also consider the safety (e.g., crime, harassment, distance) of the route to and from food distribution sites. You may be able to address some of these concerns by:

  1. Offering numerous collection points for families to avoid large gatherings.

  2. Using mobile networks to communicate and coordinate with families.

  3. Ensuring health and safety precautions through physical distancing behaviors for staff, volunteers, and families regardless of the distribution method.

- Explore the feasibility of providing transportation or home deliveries for those who cannot easily reach distribution points. Consider the logistics of home distribution including frequency, delivery method, location, safety, and potential expansion of the number of children being fed. Identify key contacts for arranging movement exemptions and access to fuel.

- Identify the protective equipment needs of beneficiaries and staff such as face masks, hand sanitizer, and gloves for health-related emergencies. Some of these items have a long shelf life and can be stored for future events. However, a rapid supply of these items will be needed in case of an outbreak, so establish a provider ahead of time if possible.

Partners in food provision and transportation

- Identify local farmers and food producers that can supply food and beverages during emergencies when supply chains may be disrupted. The cost, availability, and transport of the products need to be considered to ensure a reliable supply during emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that the food supply, particularly the supply of fresh foods (e.g., fruits and vegetables), is vulnerable to border closures and movement restrictions. Setting up direct linkages with local farmers for home/community delivery helps ensure children receive nutritious foods. See the box below and the Resource library in Annex 2 for more suggestions on how to strengthen local supply chains during emergencies.

- Explore nontraditional partners to maximize food procurement and delivery methods in emergencies. For example, options for accessing transport and/or delivery personnel might include government-managed school bus and postal delivery systems, church groups or community organizations, and private-sector package or delivery services (e.g., FedEx, DHL, Uber, and food companies). These partners can be beneficial, especially when children or their parents are unable to pick up healthy meals or ration kits due to distance or unsafe conditions.

- Explore complementary partners such as emergency services providing child health, water, and sanitation services for ways to collaborate, such as combining transport and delivery logistics.

Strengthening local supply chains during emergencies

Strengthening local supply chains can support long-term food systems and nutrition resilience and can ensure access to critical supplies during emergencies. Having access to locally grown food is particularly important during a wide-scale public health emergency like COVID-19 in which global and regional supply chains are disrupted. Diversifying local sources of supply and strengthening ties with small-scale farmers will help support local agriculture in nonemergency conditions and allow school feeding and food bank teams to call on local supplies during an emergency.

Key actions

- Develop alternative procurement sources. During an emergency, local producers may lose access to traditional markets (through traders or directly) and may look for alternative places to sell or donate their food. Food banks are an ideal outlet for surplus food from local suppliers because they can partner with schools to distribute the food. Identifying and developing relationships with local producers prior to an emergency can allow for smooth and efficient transitions when the need arises. This can also lead to long-term partnerships that support local economic and agricultural development through initiatives such as Home-Grown School Feeding programs.

Two young boys hold a meal of rice, vegetables, and tempeh from Scholars of Sustenance Thailand in Uomkoy. *(Photo: Scholars of Sustenance Thailand)*

- Mitigate food waste and practice food recovery. A public health crisis can cause major market disruptions, leading to significant waste if alternative outlets for food producers are not made available. Through food recovery and redistribution, food banks have an important role to play in reducing this waste while improving the food security and nutritional well-being of school-age children.[9] Food banks and schools can work together to position themselves as crucial outlets for fresh food through purchase or donation. Additionally, food banks can lean on pre-established partnerships with local and national governments for rapid distribution of large donations during emergencies.

For more information see "Technical resources for strengthening local supply chains" in the Resource library in Annex 2.

IN PRACTICE

Food banks establish ties to nontraditional partners

During COVID-19 response efforts, Scholars of Sustenance Indonesia, one of GFN's partner food banks, collaborated with the local police department (BRIMOB Bali) to send food parcels to several rural areas severely affected by the lockdowns and the resulting impact on the tourism sector in Bali. The police helped prepare and cook food. They then used their vehicles to deliver the food parcels to the homes of people experiencing food insecurity. In the United States, the national network of food banks (Feeding America) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) negotiated an agreement that ensures food banks responding to a declared emergency have access to fuel and other resources that are restricted to the public by the government.

Private-sector partners provide essential support

Together, the public and private sectors can roll out nutrition interventions to help combat malnutrition in children during emergencies. For example:

- Tetra Laval is a multinational corporation that focuses on efficient solutions for the production and packaging of food. In emergency school feeding, Tetra Laval established no-touch milk distribution sites in China that prioritized safety and social distancing.

- HarvestPlus works with partners to address hidden hunger on a global scale using biofortification. In Zimbabwe, where maize is a staple of daily diets, HarvestPlus introduced vitamin A maize and high-iron beans in 612 schools. Planting school gardens with biofortified crops helps prepare for emergencies by shortening the supply chain and focusing on nutritional needs.

- DSM is a global company specializing in nutrition, health, and sustainable living through fortification. It offers consumer-ready solutions to address hidden hunger, offering safe, accessible, and affordable supplementation to tackle micronutrient gaps in diets of vulnerable groups at risk of or affected by malnutrition.

- Mana Nutrition and Edesia Nutrition are nonprofit organizations that produce shelf-stable, ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSF) for school-age children distributed through the World Food Programme (WFP), USDA McGovern-Dole, and international NGO partners.

A child receives a meal prepared by Scholars of Sustenance Indonesia. The food bank operates Food Rescue Kitchens that prepares meals from surplus food. *(Photo: Scholars of Sustenance Indonesia)*

Communication needs and opportunities

- Explore lessons learned related to communications during COVID-19 and previous emergencies to determine the most effective communication strategy to accompany your ERP and reach target clients. This includes the best channels (e.g., schools, letters to parents, community groups/leaders, health workers, meetings, radio, television or digital channels, phones); communication timing (e.g., before, at the onset, and during an emergency); tone, frequency, and format (e.g., verbal or written); and the content to ensure the desired response without inciting unnecessary alarm or confusion.

- Consult with stakeholders, especially beneficiaries, to determine available and effective communication channels and strategies in your area as well as lessons learned during previous emergencies.

- Review existing communication materials on food safety and hygiene during emergencies that could accompany your program as well as partner organizations' communication activities that could be used.

Workforce considerations

- Document health and safety procedures and requirements for your workforce (staff and volunteers), including appropriate training (e.g., food safety, first aid) and personal protective equipment (PPE).

- Determine training needs for your workforce, beneficiaries, school representatives, and partners for implementing the ERP.

Students help unload supplies and equipment for the launch of Food for All Africa's 2021 LunchBox School Feeding Initiative in Anloga, Ghana. *(Photo: Food for All Africa)*

Students from Warlawurru Catholic School, a school that serves the indigenous Lundja community, eat a school breakfast provided by Foodbank Western Australia. *(Photo: Foodbank Western Australia)*

Step 4: Design and document an emergency response plan

THE INFORMATION COLLECTED IN STEP 3 must be evaluated and translated into an ERP. The exact format, targeting, and coverage of your ERP will depend on the context-specific results of your needs assessment. As much as possible, you should develop your ERP in consultation with key stakeholders (i.e., beneficiaries, schools, local food providers, local government, and donors). This can be done during the key informant interviews and meetings of step 3 and through sharing draft versions of the ERP for feedback. For maximum efficiency, prioritize the use of joint operational resources with schools and existing emergency food assistance programs.

Where possible, develop joint ERPs between partners to ensure that, when an emergency strikes, all partners are coordinating to efficiently reach the maximum number of beneficiaries.

The following subsections should be considered for inclusion within your ERP:

- *Emergency response committee*: Include names, contact details, responsibilities, and communication channels of internal staff and the wider stakeholder network.

- *Stakeholder communication strategy*: Build a strategy to ensure that when an emergency occurs, the emergency response committee knows exactly who to contact and how to commence emergency procedures. Food banks, schools, and other partners can plan ahead on

how to coordinate emergency communications to beneficiaries and families. Include details on the timing, channels, format, and messaging of communication material as well as leveraged existing communication materials.

- *Agreements with key program contributors/ funders/relevant government offices and partners*: Food bank and SFP plans should consider the requirements and expectations of primary donors and determine in advance how to communicate with them regarding the emergency and any changes or needs stemming from the situation. Ensure you understand how to acquire necessary permissions to adapt distribution methods, redirect funds for emergency needs, and make any other needed modifications to the pre-emergency service model. Establishing formal agreements with partners prior to emergencies allows for clear delineation of roles and expectations for fast activation and implementation during emergencies.

- *Emergency food assistance distribution method*: The preparation and provision of food can take on many different forms based on the availability of food supply, local producers, food safety considerations, household cooking and storage capacities, nutrition needs, availability and safety of distribution points, congregate food preparation facilities, and transport capacities. Some methods/strategies include:

  » Delivering **food baskets directly to homes** with available means of transportation (school buses, delivery trucks)

  » Distributing **food baskets through multiple collection points** (schools, food banks, community centers, or other identified safe spaces)

  » Providing **cash or voucher transfers** as a school meal alternative

  » Offering **dry take-home rations**

  » Offering **cooked take-home rations**

  » Offering **cooked in-person meals** while accounting for social distancing requirements

Important considerations for your food assistance strategy are detailed in the "Safe food distribution guide for food banks and schools" (Annex 5). During public health emergencies, your distribution method may need to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, during COVID-19, when children/families were sick or quarantined, it was necessary to have alternative plans for providing meals to these students to ensure they still received the nutrition support but did not go to school or the distribution points where they could potentially infect others.

Emergency strategies should include objectives that maintain the nutrition standards of food provisions to meet the needs of children. In an emergency that disrupts food supply chains, access to micronutrient-rich fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods may become more difficult, and processed foods may be the most readily available. See the box on pages 17 and 18 and the Resource library in Annex 2 for suggestions for maintaining nutrition and food safety.

> **Emergency strategies should include objectives that maintain the nutrition standards of food provisions to meet the needs of children.**

- *Targeting and coverage*: Detail the intended beneficiaries and coverage of your ERP. Consider the reach and targeting of other active emergency food assistance programs to maximize collective reach. Include the age range, number of children, location, gender, and special needs considerations of the intended beneficiaries.

- *Food safety and nutrition protocols/guidelines*: Emergency situations often create new food safety and nutrition risks that your ERP must address. The box on pages 17 and 18 details specific food safety and nutrition considerations.

- *Gender protection protocols*: SFPs are a powerful tool for advancing gender equity, though

emergency situations can threaten this progress by disproportionately burdening women and girls. The box on pages 19 and 20 provides key considerations and actions your ERP can include to protect women and girls during emergencies.

- *Emergency procurement guidelines:* Discuss emergency procurement guidelines with vendors and donors in advance to account for potentially changing production and packaging needs during an emergency response. Agree on relevant cost factors, logistics, and timing to determine a fair price and facilitate a seamless transition when the emergency strikes.

- *Detailed implementation plan, including monitoring and evaluation:* Include a continual step-by-step monitoring and evaluation plan to identify bottlenecks early and opportunities to quickly adapt during emergencies.

- *Transition plan:* As the emergency eases, your operations can start transitioning back to normal programming, though some transitional activities are often needed. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, SFPs resumed when schools reopened. However additional PPE was required during food preparation/service, and food banks also provided food relief to families going through isolation.

- *Evaluation strategy:* Each emergency brings with it new lessons, tools, partnerships, and knowledge to apply to your SFP and ERP. Set aside time once the emergency eases to capture and apply these lessons, particularly to form relationships that may have emerged with local food producers and vendors.

A boy eats a snack from an organization called Familias Trabajadoras Felices por el Cambio that works with Banco de Alimentos Quito in Ecuador. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Ana María Buitron)*

Nutrition and food safety considerations within emergency response plans

Food safety considerations

- Consider food safety at every stage: storage, handling, transportation, and preparation. Anticipate and plan for the conditions under which children will be consuming the food and gear the provisions to those realities.
- When school meal provision shifts from a congregate setting to a take-home or delivery model, consider the following:
  - » Time and temperature of food during storage, handling, transportation, and preparation.
  - » Type of foods included in the food provision, whether prepared meals or food baskets. For example, the food bank Rise Against Hunger Philippines provided prepared fortified rice and vegetable meals that parents picked up for children to eat immediately at home. A food bank in Ecuador, Banco de Alimentos Diakonía, provided take-home rations to be cooked at home that included rice, lentils, oil, salt, sugar, oats, and canned tuna, all of which have a long shelf life and can be stored at an ambient temperature. Food for All Africa, a food bank in Ghana, also provided take-home rations to be cooked at home, which included rice, gari, beans, pasta, smoked fish, and oil.
- If prepared meals are distributed, they should ideally be served in a congregate setting at the point of production.
- If prepared meals are delivered to homes, meals should be chilled below 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4.4 degrees Celsius) before delivery and should be refrigerated until reheated for mealtime. Prepared meals should never be held at an ambient temperature for longer than two hours.

You can find more resources on food safety under "Technical resources for distributing food safely" in the Resource library in Annex 2.

Nutrition suggestions

Emergency situations can increase the risk of all forms of child malnutrition due to their far-reaching impacts on food, health, and social protection systems. Providing reliable and nutritious food to school-age children and adolescents is vital to keeping children healthy during emergencies and is essential to rebuilding and recovering after crises. The following actions for food banks and SFP implementers can help ensure that child hunger and nutritional needs are prioritized during an emergency.

- Identify children's nutrition priorities based on their nutrition status, socioeconomic situation, and community needs. More details on this can be found in the *Developing a School Feeding Program* guide developed by GFN and GCNF.
- Follow national food-based dietary guidelines, nutrition standards, and guidelines for school meals (if they exist). Work with schools to maintain or (if deemed crucial) enhance the nutrition content (compared to regularly provided school meals) of the food provided during the emergency.
- Ensure access to clean drinking water. If this is a risk during emergencies, work with partners to prioritize access through the restoration of water services and provision of emergency water supplies.
- Provide food and meals that help address nutrition priorities.
- Procure micronutrient-rich foods (e.g., milk, eggs, dried or canned fish, beans) and fortified commodities (e.g., fortified flour, rice, milk, oil) from local markets as much as possible.
- Include fruits, vegetables, and eggs as valuable sources of nutrition. Many fruits, vegetables, and eggs can be stored at an ambient temperature. Eggs do not require refrigeration in most countries outside the United States.

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Students from Brilliant Angels Education Centre in Nairobi eat lunch provided by Food Banking Kenya. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Brian Otieno)*

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- Support micronutrient supplementation where appropriate.
- For prepared/cooked meals, consider:
  » Including fresh fruits or vegetables;
  » Prioritizing purchases from local and small-scale producers (when possible); and
  » Avoiding the provision of meals or food products with low nutrition content that do not meet nutrition needs (e.g., packaged juices with low fruit and high sugar content).
- For food baskets with dry rations, consider:
  » Including foods that are of long storage and high nutrition value (e.g., UHT milk), powdered eggs, fruits (e.g., apples) and vegetables (e.g., potatoes, carrots);
  » Avoiding food products with low nutrition content; and
  » Providing foods that are easy to prepare, especially if cooking facilities vary from family to family.
- For cash and voucher transfers,[10] consider:
  » Promoting a transfer value based on a food basket similar to the regular school meals or with enhanced nutrition content;
  » Favoring, where possible, a female household member as the recipient of the transfer (child welfare is improved when women have control of a greater share of household resources);[11]
  » Keeping track of the availability of nutritious foods in the market due to disruptions in the food supply chain; and
  » Providing accompanying messages that inform recipients of the intended use of the food, promote best use and preparation of food, and provide health and safety information related to the public health emergency.
- Review foods and nutritional products that are available locally and/or through international food aid that would fulfill the food and nutritional needs of your target community. Consider setting upper limits for saturated fat, sugars, and sodium of included foods, especially when using processed foods such as packaged snacks.[12]
- Food banks, schools, and other partners can work together to leverage financial resources and joint procurement strategies for nutritious produce, ready-to-use foods, or fortified and biofortified commodities, especially for child populations with known micronutrient deficiencies.[13]

You can find more resources on nutrition under "Technical resources for meeting children's nutritional needs in emergencies" in the Resource library in Annex 2.

IN PRACTICE

Meeting children's nutritional needs in emergencies

India FoodBanking Network: COVID-19 impacts on procurement strategies

India FoodBanking Network (IFBN) has worked with the private sector to serve more than 3.6 million nutritious meals to children in schools. When schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IFBN's school nutrition programs were repurposed to provide children with take-home "nutri-kits" so they would receive adequate nutrition while at home. Nutri-kits were designed to include culturally appropriate and nutritious foods, including flattened rice, semolina, soya chunks, roasted pulses, and peanuts. The pandemic revealed the importance of a healthy diet for strong immune systems, and IFBN intends to further prioritize nutrition in its programs.

Children receive a prepared school lunch made possible by India FoodBanking Network.
(Photo: India FoodBanking Network)

To meet children's nutritional needs, IFBN quickly pivoted its model to acquire food that supported healthy diets and aligned with changing community needs for essential staples and fresh produce that were culturally appropriate. IFBN increased its purchase of nonperishable staples from 10 percent (pre-COVID) to 40 percent and fresh produce from 15 percent to 20 percent. It reduced its use of donated packaged foods from 75 percent to 40 percent. This strategy develops more resilient supply chains and strengthens procurement partnerships with farmers, wholesalers, local produce markets, and government stocks.

Protection and gender equity in emergencies

During school closures, adolescent girls face disproportional risk for school dropout due to sexual exploitation, early pregnancy, early and forced marriage, and increased domestic responsibilities. Safeguarding school meal services during school closures, especially for girls, through alternative delivery mechanisms can help mitigate the negative impacts on their education, psychological health, and physical health. School health, hygiene, and nutrition facilities—particularly access to school meals—incentivize families to send girls back to school, which prevents early marriage, delays first pregnancy, and reduces the risk of child labor. Intersectoral collaboration between the education sector, school feeding practitioners, and food banks, as well as the promotion of voucher schemes, take-home rations, and food collection points, may mitigate the negative impacts of school closures, particularly on vulnerable girls.

Key actions

1. **Implement alternative transfer modalities targeted to girls.** Ensure that vulnerable girls' food needs are safely met during school closures through modalities such as food vouchers, meal deliveries, take-home rations, or cash transfers.[14]

2. **Address the specific micronutrient needs of adolescent girls**. If possible, provide girls with iron and folic acid supplementation, along with nutrition education about the increased risk of anemia, during school closures.[15] Schools and food banks can work together to develop and deliver food baskets that can mitigate the risks of micronutrient deficiencies.

3. **Safeguard vital health and nutrition services.** When schools are closed, girls and the most vulnerable children are unable to access school meals or other vital health and social services. When possible, pair food distribution with menstrual hygiene supplies and access to psychosocial support. Work across sectors to provide alternative social services and support over the phone, text, or other forms of media.

4. **Procure food locally and strengthen ties with local supply chains.** If food is procured locally during "nonemergency times," this can create a stable, predictable market for local farmers, especially small-scale farmers. In some

Children stand with bags of groceries provided by Fundación Banco de Alimentos Paraguay in Asunción. (Photo: Fundación Banco de Alimentos Paraguay)

regions, up to 70 percent of these farmers are women.[16] Many of these women may be mothers of the children who are being fed through the school meal program.

5. **Work with religious, health, and other trusted leaders.** Ensure their understanding of the special needs of and threats to girls in emergencies. Enlist their support to monitor the situation and mitigate risks.

6. **Advocate for boys and girls to return to school as soon as safety permits.** The longer vulnerable children are out of school due to an emergency, the more likely they are to drop out of school.[17]

» During the Ebola crisis in West Africa, countries struggled to get boys and girls back in school for the simple reason that families were not aware of the schools' safety protocols.[18] Food banks and school feeding staff can work together and with trusted community partners to clearly communicate to parents the measures taken to ensure safety of the school environment.

» When boys are out of school, families often need them to work, often in informal jobs, to help supplement family incomes. Such jobs may be high-risk and exploitative, exposing them to increased levels of violence and abuse.

» The provision of gender-specific toilets and menstrual **hygiene** products can help girls feel more supported in the return to school.

For more information on gender-responsive actions that address the unique needs of girls and boys during emergencies, see "Technical resources for addressing gender equity" in the Resource library in <u>Annex 2</u>.

IN PRACTICE

Gender equity in emergencies

By mid-April 2020, COVID-19 lockdowns kept 94 percent of schoolchildren worldwide outside of school—half of which were girls.[19] With school closures and scant access to school meals, many vulnerable households resorted to negative coping mechanisms that disproportionately affected young girls, including increased school dropout rates, gender-based violence, early marriage, and child labor. In Kenya, for example, over a three-month period during COVID-19 lockdowns, "152,000 teenage girls became pregnant—a 40 percent increase [compared] to the country's monthly average."[20] Save the Children estimates 500,000 girls are at risk of child marriage due to pandemic-related school closures.[21] Women and girls represent 60 percent of the world's undernourished,[22] and the pandemic has only exacerbated their food insecurity and hunger. Furthermore, several studies show that women tend to eat last and the least,[23] especially in the Global South and during emergencies.

Taking action

• In Colombia, the Ministry of Education is giving autonomy to the regions to make decisions on school feeding responses according to their capacities and needs.[24] This decentralized approach allows regions to focus efforts on extending food vouchers, meal deliveries, and take-home rations, specifically to vulnerable girls, as needed.

• In Kerala, India, teachers communicate with families to collect or distribute food baskets in their localities.[25] With this localized approach, the teachers can focus on families with vulnerable girls to ensure that their health and nutrition are prioritized and addressed.

A girl holds a food parcel provided by her local food bank in Mexico City, Mexico. *(Photo: Bancos de Alimentos de México)*

The cofounder of FoodCycle Indonesia gives a breakfast kit to a boy during a COVID-19 lockdown in Bekasi.
(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Dody Kusuma)

Step 5: Communicate your emergency response plan

ONCE YOU DEVELOP YOUR ERP, communicate this plan to all stakeholders. It is important to gain buy-in so they feel ownership and cooperate in implementing the ERP when an emergency strikes. If it was not done during development, consider holding meetings with your key stakeholders to present the ERP and ask for feedback. Any updates based on the feedback should then be communicated to all stakeholders. Partnerships with various stakeholders can be leveraged to develop joint communication material and amplify reach.

Schools and beneficiaries

- Share the ERP with students and families so they are aware of what to expect when an emergency occurs. Special attention should be placed on using local language and resources such as infographics that consider literacy limitations.

- Ensure contact information is available for students and recipient families. Record multiple forms of communication to reach families in case preferred communication methods are disabled during the emergency.

- Create or source age-appropriate and culturally sensitive infographics and learning materials on infectious disease prevention for school staff, students, parents, food handlers, and communities.

- Consider the potential for contradictory or confusing messages and/or the deliberate or innocent passing of misinformation that can occur

in an emergency. Develop mitigation measures that might clarify the messages and counter any false information.

- During emergencies, ensure messages align with government guidance, partner communications, and lead emergency response agencies to avoid confusion.

Internal staff and volunteers

- Publish your ERP. This ensures everyone has access to the same information when they need it.

- Incorporate your ERP into your SFP guidelines that are provided to the staff and volunteers at active schools.

- Train staff, volunteers, and partners. Training for an emergency in advance improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the response. Joint training of food bank and school staff, active community members, and partners in the core aspects of food distribution during a public health emergency can reduce the duplication of efforts and costs and introduce colleagues with similar roles and skills who do not normally work together. Involving the community and trusted local leaders in the training helps build capacity and strengthen engagement and commitment to supporting the plans.

Wider stakeholders

- Share the ERP and pertinent information with relevant local and national government representatives, the Global Education Cluster, Emergency Food Security Clusters, and other emergency entities to receive their input and ensure coordination.

- Identify local opinion leaders, traditional community leaders, and religious organizations that can be trusted and influential in eliciting needed actions during a wide-scale public health emergency.

- Engage local media (e.g., radio, television, and social media) and inform them about the ERP to establish the best communication strategy to be used during an emergency.

> **Involving the community and trusted local leaders in the training helps build capacity and strengthen engagement and commitment to supporting the plans.**

Students wash their hands during the COVID-19 pandemic at a handwashing station provided by Food for All Africa in Anloga, Ghana. *(Photo: Food For All Africa)*

A boy eats food provided by FoodCycle Indonesia at Kasih Sesama Umat Orphanage in Tangerang. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Dody Kusuma)*

Step 6: Implement, monitor, and evaluate your emergency response plan

WHEN A PANDEMIC or other wide-scale public health emergency occurs, food banks and schools can work together to rapidly implement ERPs. In addition to the comprehensive data collection detailed in step 3, rapid needs assessments during the emergency are necessary to meet complex, evolving needs and measure the effectiveness of interventions.

Food banks and schools can take the following actions to coordinate an emergency response when school feeding or child hunger programs are disrupted.

1. *Activate your emergency stakeholder committee.* This may be limited to internal staff or extended to broader stakeholders depending on your planning process and context. Communication and coordination are key—the earlier the outreach to relevant partners the better.

2. *Rapidly assess food assistance needs and identify areas of collaboration* for food supply, preparation, and delivery. Refer to joint ERPs, if available.

3. *Activate your ERP* to coordinate alternative distribution modalities and ensure uninterrupted food supply to children despite school closures. Ensure continual monitoring and evaluation to respond to challenges and improve program efficiency. Coordinate with relevant clusters

and other emergency response entities to reach vulnerable children and recipients.

4. *Communicate and coordinate with schools, local authorities, partners, emergency responders, and families.* Organize online networks and maps, if and where possible, using digital tools to coordinate approaches and responses. Consult with teachers and other locally knowledgeable and trusted people who may know of or hear from children in need.

5. *As the emergency fades, plan to rebuild and improve programs* to establish resilience. Use this opportunity to strengthen linkages with local farmers, including small-scale farmers; prioritize vulnerable schoolchildren, especially girls; publicize successful approaches; and solidify partnerships between schools and food banks. Capture lessons learned and new partnerships formed within your SFP and revise your ERP.

6. *For school reopenings,* refer to the *Multisectoral Checklist for School Reopening and School Based Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19* from WFP and UNICEF.
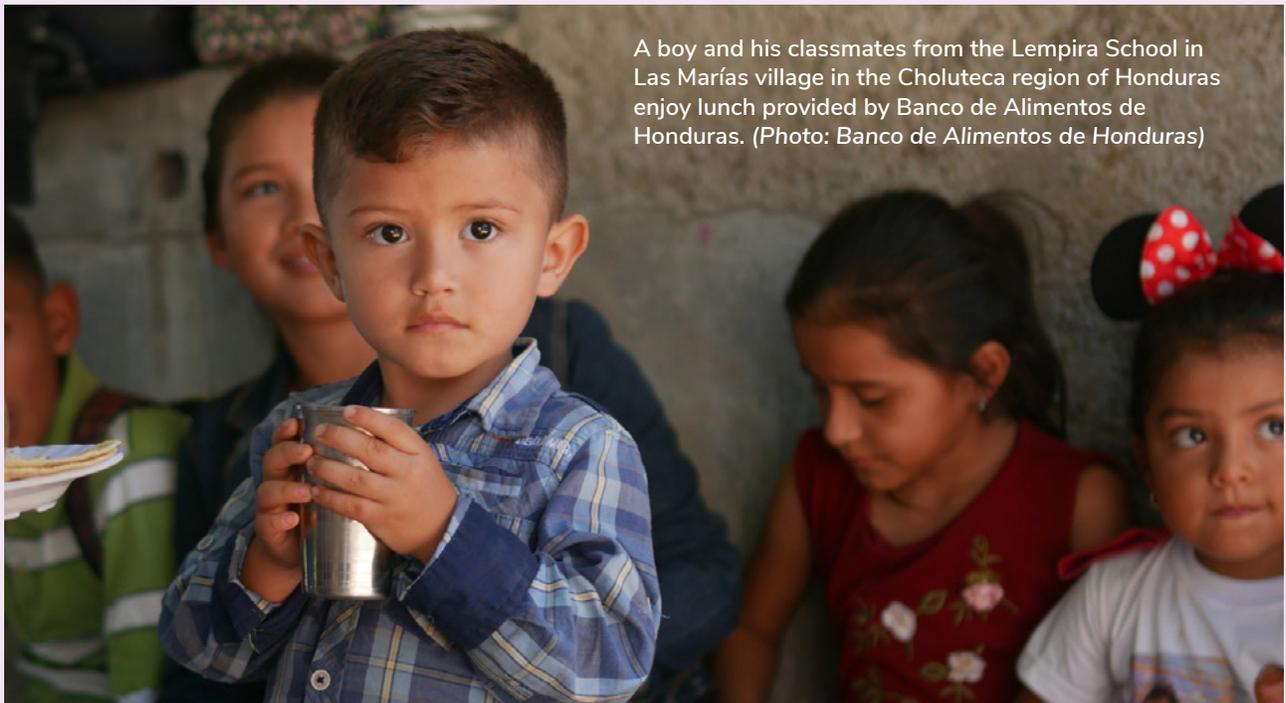
A boy and his classmates from the Lempira School in Las Marías village in the Choluteca region of Honduras enjoy lunch provided by Banco de Alimentos de Honduras. *(Photo: Banco de Alimentos de Honduras)*

IN PRACTICE

Harnessing digital tools during an emergency

During emergencies, digital tools can enhance communication, monitoring and evaluation, and interaction with beneficiaries as well as provide innovative education platforms. For example, during the COVID-19-related school closures in Honduras, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) quickly pivoted to take-home rations with the support and approval of its donors, USDA McGovern-Dole and the Government of Honduras. Parents and caregivers were informed about the timing, content, and protocols for the distributions through WhatsApp and radio messages. When parents arrived at the schools to collect the rations, they also received education packets and reading materials to engage children at home. Finally, to reach students in remote communities with little or no access to the internet or technology, CRS piloted the use of SMS text messages for lessons in Spanish and social-emotional learning (SEL). A study at the end of the pilot showed that 70 percent of students in grades 3 to 6 reported learning Spanish, 72 percent reported learning about SEL, and 90 percent reported that the SMS text messages were a factor in preventing school dropout.[26]

Quick guide to developing an emergency response plan

1. **Establish an emergency response committee** to plan and implement your emergency response plan (ERP).

2. **Reach out to existing and potential partners** in emergency response and school feeding to maximize coordination and efficiency.

3. **Review existing information to inform the design and targeting of your ERP.** This includes information on the local food supply chain, nutritional needs, food safety considerations, gender equity concerns, and logistical factors related to food access, preparation, and transportation.

4. **Identify and map schools, households, or potential safe spaces in the area** that can be used for distributing take-home rations. Assess the reach and coverage of existing emergency food assistance plans by other stakeholders and clusters. Consider expanding your ERP coverage to reach children who fall outside your existing programs and other ERPs such as out-of-school children, children with special access needs, and children under 5.

5. **Identify, share, and leverage joint operational resources with schools and other partners.** Strengthen overall connections between schools and food banks by identifying operational areas of cooperation and exchanging pertinent information prior to an emergency. Complete the "School and food bank capacities and resources for feeding children during emergencies" questionnaire (Annex 4), and share it with relevant colleagues to assist in the planning process.

6. **Develop and document your ERP.** To meet the nutritional needs of children and households with the greatest need in the safest, most efficient approach possible, establish:

   • Safe meal preparation, transport, and distribution protocols;

   • Clear documentation of joint approaches, partnerships, and responsibilities;

   • Agreements for food provision, bulk food procurement, transport, and storage resources;

   • Clear communication strategies for partners and beneficiaries;

   • Monitoring and evaluation procedures for implementation of the ERP.

7. **Communicate your ERP, and ensure that food bank and school staff are trained.** Prepare to carry out emergency protocols together. ERPs should be easily and readily available to staff for training and reference during an emergency.

8. **When an emergency occurs, rapidly evaluate the situation, engage stakeholders, and implement your ERP** with continual monitoring and evaluation to adapt quickly and efficiently to your communities' needs.

9. **As the emergency eases, capture the lessons learned and solidify new partnerships,** particularly with local food producers and smallholder farmers, within your SFP and ERP revisions.

Resource library

Technical resources for preparing for and responding to an emergency

School Feeding in an Emergency Situation: Guidelines

This WFP document is "designed to guide WFP country offices in deciding whether or not to utilize [school feeding] in an emergency setting and, if so, how best to design and implement such a programme." It includes guidance on situation analysis in pre-emergency planning, program design, and program implementation. It details how to work with partners and includes a collection of operational checklists on these topics.

Rethinking Emergency School Feeding: A Child-Centered Approach

This report by WFP explores the ways in which school feeding plays a role in emergency contexts. It argues for an approach to emergency school feeding that shifts from an activity-centered to a beneficiary-centered intervention, where the needs of child and youth beneficiaries guide emergency response activities and modalities to ensure children's protection and food access in support of education goals.

Emergency Readiness Plan: A Guide for the School Foodservice Operation

This guide outlines six steps for school feeding emergency preparedness in the US context. Operational and practical, it considers food safety concerns, disruption in the supply chain, coordination and leadership, emergency plan evaluation, and more.

Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools

This interagency document from UNICEF, WHO, and IFRC provides clear and actionable guidance for safe operations through the prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19 in schools and other educational facilities.

Multisectoral Checklist for School Re-Openings and School-Based Nutrition in the Context of COVID-19

This COVID-19-specific document outlines both a nutrition and cross-sectoral checklist for the reopening of schools to be used by school practitioners and ministries involved with school feeding. The checklist items are organized between "prior to opening" and "after opening." The guidelines include recommendations for nutrition; child protection; education; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); and health services through the school platform.

The Joint Education Needs Assessment Toolkit

This toolkit developed by the Global Education Cluster provides guidance for conducting joint needs assessments in the first weeks and months of an emergency. It enables staff and partners in the field to undertake preparedness planning for emergency assessments and collectively design and conduct rapid or comprehensive needs assessments. The Global Education Cluster has also developed the *Safe Back to School: A Practitioners Guide*, while the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies contains a host of tools for emergency planning.

Global Food Security Cluster

The Global Food Security Cluster approach was

established in 2011 to coordinate the food security response during a humanitarian crisis, addressing issues of food availability, access, and utilization. The cluster is based at the WFP headquarters in Rome and is co-led by FAO and WFP. Their _Food Security and Livelihoods Indicator Handbook_ assists both technical and nontechnical food security members on a core number of food security indicators.

Child Protection Area of Responsibility: Strategy 2020–2024

The Global Protection Cluster's strategy envisions a world in which children are protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence during emergencies. It supports global, regional, and local actors to ensure that humanitarian efforts to protect children in humanitarian and early warning settings are timely and well coordinated as well as achieve maximum coverage, quality, and impact.

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Health, Nutrition, and WASH COVID-19 Resource Page

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is an open, global network of members working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure that all individuals have the right to a quality, safe, relevant, and equitable education. INEE's work is founded on the fundamental right to education.

Mitigating the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food and Nutrition of Schoolchildren

This joint note from WFP, FAO, and UNICEF provides government decision makers, school administrators/staff, and partners with guidance on how to support, modify, or adapt school feeding to help protect schoolchildren's food security and nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides specific recommendations according to the multiple target groups involved in school feeding such as actors on national/governmental levels and school administrators.

Nutrition and Cash-Based Interventions

This technical guide by FAO offers recommendations on how to improve nutrition through cash-based interventions.

Nutrition and Education Collaboration - Checklist for Reopening Schools: A Coordinated Response for Children to Return to School

This checklist by UNICEF provides suggested actions for the short- and long-term planning and implementation of school reopening that support child nutrition. Each section addresses one of four main nutrition-related areas: school meals, school nutrition services, school nutrition education, and school food environment.

A family opens a drink provided by Foodbank Rus in Moscow, Russia. *(Photo: Foodbank Rus)*

Technical resources for strengthening local supply chains

Interim Guidance Note: Mitigating the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food and Nutrition of Schoolchildren

This joint note from WFP, FAO, and UNICEF provides government decision makers, school administrators/staff, and partners with preliminary guidance on how to support, transform, or adapt school feeding (in the short term) to safeguard schoolchildren's food security and nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. A section specific to Home-Grown School Feeding programs provides points to consider to continue supporting smallholder farmers during an emergency.

Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework

Developed by leading international partners, this framework helps governments design, plan, and implement their own programs, selecting what they need from the most current and reviewed tools. The resource framework guides countries in using the latest tools and documented best practices that link school feeding with local smallholder farm production and nutrition.

COVID-19 and the Role of Local Food Production in Building More Resilient Local Food Systems

This FAO policy brief details the importance of local food production to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on food supply. It provides innovative country examples to build resilient local food production systems.

COVID-19 and the Risk to Food Supply Chains: How to Respond?

This FAO policy brief details priority actions to ensure food supply chains continue moving.

COVID-19 and Global Food Security

In this book, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) researchers and guest bloggers provide key insights and analysis on how the global pandemic is affecting global poverty and food security and nutrition, food trade and supply chains, gender, employment, and a variety of policy interventions. They reflect on how we can use these lessons to better prepare for future pandemics.

Catalyzing the Scale-Up of Crop Biofortification

This strategic brief by CGIAR details the importance and potential of crop biofortification for addressing micronutrient deficiencies and actions to scale up and mainstream biofortification.

COVID-19 Is Making It Harder for Vulnerable People to Access Healthy Food. Strengthening Large Scale Food Fortification Should Be Part of the Response.

This brief makes the case for large-scale staple food fortification as a critically important tool to fight malnutrition, including during emergencies.

Technical resources for meeting children's nutritional needs in emergencies

Food and Nutrition Needs in Emergencies

UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO developed these guidelines in 2004 as a practical tool for assessing, estimating, and monitoring the food and nutrition needs of populations in emergencies.

Interventions for Addressing Vitamin and Mineral Inadequacies

This 2014 USAID brief provides an overview of effective ways to deliver essential vitamins and minerals to populations and describes advantages and limitations of different micronutrient approaches to support program managers in selecting the appropriate intervention.

Interim Guidance Note: Mitigating the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food and Nutrition of Schoolchildren

This guidance note by WFP, FAO, and UNICEF provides specific recommendations to various target groups involved in school feeding for response during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19: Missing More Than a Classroom: The Impact of School Closures on Children's Nutrition

This working paper from the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti describes the immediate and long-term impacts of school closures on school-age children. It provides key recommendations and best practices on alternative approaches to school feeding during the pandemic and preparation for school reopening.

Fortification and Biofortification to Meet Children's Nutritional Needs

This GCNF brief provides an overview of how fortification and biofortification can meet child nutrition objectives and create a more nutritious food system through school meal programs. It includes data from the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©.

The School Meals Approach in Africa: Addressing Child Malnutrition with Biofortified Foods

HarvestPlus demonstrates how micronutrient-rich, biofortified foods and supportive government policies make school meals and schoolchildren healthier in Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Technical resources for distributing food safely

Safe Food Distribution Guide for Food Banks and Schools

This comprehensive guide from GFN and GCNF defines appropriate protocols depending on the variable contextual factors during a pandemic or public health emergency.

Interim Recommendations for Adjusting Food Distribution Standard Operating Procedures in the Context of the COVID-19 Outbreak

This INEE document guides the revision of existing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for food distribution in the COVID-19 context at the country level to minimize the risk of exposure of personnel, partners, and beneficiaries. It is not meant to replace existing SOPs but rather complement them.

A boy who is in temporary care at Solomons Haven eats lunch provided by FoodForward SA in Cape Town, South Africa. *(Photo: The Global FoodBanking Network/Anna Lusty)*

Distribution of Emergency Food During a Pandemic

This toolkit by the Pan American Health Organization provides local municipalities with a step-by-step guide to assess emergency food needs, secure nutritious stocks, store food stock, determine who should receive emergency supplies, and distribute emergency supplies.

COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response WASH and Infection Prevention and Control Measures in Schools

This UNICEF guidance note provides an overview of infection prevention and control (IPC) and its intersection with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). It describes how UNICEF staff can help prevent infection and its spread in schools.

School Feeding Handbook

Tetra Laval's handbook on SFPs provides details on food safety considerations, program management elements, and country case studies.

Technical resources for addressing gender equity

Building Back Equal: Girls Back to School Guide

This guide builds on the UN Framework for Reopening Schools and further promotes the development of gender-responsive education systems and targeted actions to ensure girls' continuity of learning and return to school when reopened.

Left Out and Left Behind: Ignoring Women Will Prevent Us from Solving the Hunger Crisis

This policy report from CARE details the COVID-19-related hunger pandemic and its disproportionate effects on women and girls. It provides recommendations to address this crisis.

Gender-Responsive Education in the Context of COVID19: Framework and Progressive Standards for South Asia

The UNICEF framework and progressive standards for South Asia promotes gender-responsive education, detailing the disproportionate impact of school closures on girls, the digital gender divide, and approaches to achieving an equitable return to school, including investing in gender-responsive teachers.

Gender-Responsive Prevention and Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic: From Emergency Response to Recovery & Resilience

This proposal by UN Women supports a gender-responsive approach to mitigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action

This handbook from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) outlines the rationale for integrating gender equity into humanitarian action and provides practical guidance for doing so across sectors.

Adolescent Programming Toolkit: Guidance and Tools for Adolescent Programming and Girls' Empowerment in Crisis Settings

This Plan International toolkit promotes adolescent-responsive programming, which is the intentional design and implementation of actions that meet the gender, age-specific, and diverse needs, priorities, and capacities as identified by adolescents themselves, with special attention to girls and at-risk adolescents.

Developing Gender-Sensitive Value Chains: Guidelines for Practitioners

This guide provides tools, approaches, and resources developed by FAO and other partners working on gender, agriculture, and value chain development.

The descriptions of the technical resources in this Annex are primarily sourced from the original text in the respective referenced document.

Glossary

Biofortified foods	Food crops that have been fortified through plant growth rather than after harvest. Biofortified foods are nutritionally improved through agronomic practices, plant breeding, or modern biotechnology.
Complementary activity or program	An activity or program implemented in the school context that can complement the objectives of an SFP or vice versa. Common examples of activities/programs that might complement SFPs are: food and nutrition education; deworming treatment; handwashing with soap (just before and/or after the students eat); various types of health and wellness exams; malaria or HIV/AIDS prevention programs; and school gardens.
Cash transfer or voucher program	Payments made (e.g., via cash, vouchers, or debit cards) to families. A conditional cash transfer is given for specified actions, such as children attending school a required number of days per month. In the case of school closure due to a public health emergency, cash transfers or vouchers may be the best option when food distribution is untenable.
Child-centered approach	An approach that prioritizes food and nutrition security along with protection for the child population affected by a crisis or emergency.
Child-friendly spaces (CFSs)	Safe spaces set up in emergency settings to support and protect children. CFSs restore a sense of normality and continuity for children whose lives have been disrupted by war, natural disaster, or other emergencies.[27]
Child hunger programs	Targeted programs that provide food and other services to children facing food insecurity. Examples of programs include school breakfast, school lunch, backpack programs/weekend take-home rations, summer or holiday food programs, and food and nutrition education.
Child protection	The safeguarding of children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for the protection of children in and out of the home.
Dry rations	Food rations that typically comprise cereal, legumes, oil, or sugar. They do not include fresh foods.
Emergency preparedness	The knowledge and capacities to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent, or current disasters or emergencies.[28]
Emergency response	A systematic response to an emergency that aims to mitigate the impact on people and the environment.
Feeding modality or (school) food provision	The unique set of foods or a unique feeding schedule for a targeted student population within an SFP. More than one modality may apply in the same program. Examples of SFP modalities are school-based meals (breakfast, lunch, or dinner), school-based snacks, take-home rations, and conditional cash transfers. An SFP that provides a daily hot meal for students in school and a monthly take-home ration for some or all students has two feeding modalities.[29]

Food basket	Food items or commodities included in an SFP or for school food distribution.
	A very simple food basket might include a flour made with corn meal and soy blend, along with some sugar and oil (for serving as a hot breakfast porridge). A more complex food basket might comprise a mixture of protein(s), cereal(s), fruit(s), vegetable(s), condiments, and one or more drinks.
	A food basket, sometimes referred to as a food parcel or package, is distributed to children and/or households when an in-school meal is not available or accessible due to a public health emergency.
Fortified	The addition of one or more essential nutrients to a food. A nutrient can be added for the purpose of preventing or correcting a demonstrated deficiency of the specified nutrient(s) in the population.
Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF)	An SFP designed to involve small-scale farmers and stimulate local production. By purchasing the required food from local small-scale farmers and processors, HGSF programs can stimulate local production, create a stable demand for quality and safe food, and support the development of local skills. By providing initial assistance to local farmers to develop their capacity to provide a reliable food supply, HGSF programs can expand opportunities for small-scale farmers to gain access to other markets. Even if only a small percentage of food is purchased locally from small-scale farmers, a program can be considered HGSF if it is designed to support local food markets and if this is included in program implementation and in related policies and regulations.[30]
Implementation	The activities related to putting a planned program into practice.
Implementing partner	A partner (e.g., food bank, school, catering company, or nonprofit organization) that implements some or all of the program in cooperation with the entity in charge of the program. In cases where the entity in charge of program management is not implementing all aspects, an implementing partner carries out some or all of the program. In most cases, the implementing partners for large-scale/national programs will be UN agencies such as WFP or nongovernmental (charitable or for-profit) organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Counterpart International, Mary's Meals, Nascent Solutions, Save the Children, or large-scale catering firms/companies that provide some or all food and services for the programs.[31]
In-kind contribution/ donation	Contribution of food, goods, or services (rather than, or in addition to, a financial/cash contribution). In the case of SFPs, local, national, or international entities ranging from parents and community members to local farmers to large-scale donors—particularly USDA's McGovern-Dole Food for Education program—may contribute in kind to the program.[32]
Individual targeting	Targeting based on individual student characteristics. This is used to determine the eligibility of a student to receive an SFP's benefits depending on the distinguishing characteristics (e.g., household income level, ethnicity, or gender) of the individual or their circumstances. Examples include take-home rations targeted specifically to encourage girls' attendance or free meals to children of a particularly low-income or marginalized group.[33]
Micronutrient powder (MNP)	A powder (usually prepackaged) containing vitamins and minerals that can be sprinkled onto any food in a dosage specific to the quantity and type of food being consumed. The powder often contains multiple micronutrients mixed together. MNPs are used in SFPs to increase the micronutrient content of students' diets without changing their normal dietary habits.
Micronutrient supplementation	The provision of pharmaceutically prepared vitamins and minerals for treatment or prevention of specific micronutrient deficiency.[34] Supplements can be powders (see "Micronutrient powder" above) or tablets.

Monitoring	Ongoing review of the SFP to guide management decisions during program implementation. This is not the same as "evaluation" of a program.[35]
National school feeding program	An SFP that is managed and/or administered by the national/regional/local government or a nongovernmental entity in coordination with a national government.[36]
Pandemic	An epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, multiple continents, or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of people.
Processed food	Food prepared for consumption on a large scale, usually done in a large facility with the intention of easing on-site preparation or making ready-to-eat products. In the context of food bank food distribution or SFPs, examples include factory-made biscuits and breads or processed and packaged ready-to-eat foods or meals that may be donated from food companies.
Public health emergency	An event determined to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response.
Pulses and legumes	A legume is a plant in the family of *Fabaceae* or the fruit or seed of such a plant. Pulses are legume crops harvested solely for the dry seed.
Small-scale farmer	A farmer with limited resources that operates at a small scale (as determined with reference to the local setting). Other terms may be used to describe small-scale farmers such as "smallholder farmer," "family farmer," and "subsistence farmer." HGSF is intended to particularly engage and benefit small-scale farmers who are low-income and/or subsistence oriented.[37]
Take-home rations (THRs)	Food items provided to students that are targeted to the student or to the whole household. THRs typically include dry rations (see above) or food staples such as rice, beans, flour, and oil. THRs may also be intended for children's consumption to give schoolchildren food during weekends or school vacations if the children are deemed vulnerable (based on individual characteristics such as gender, the family's economic status, and/or being a member of a specific minority group). They are provided during periods when food is not available at school and/or children are not expected to be in school, such as during a crisis or public health emergency.
Take-home meals	Prepared meals provided to students that can either be delivered to homes or picked up at a food distribution site.

School and food bank capacities and resources for feeding children during emergencies

Information for schools to share with food banks and other local partners

Schools and food banks may both be positioned to provide nutrition services to children and families during emergencies. The following tool can help schools and food banks identify and document resources and capacities that they can leverage during emergencies. It is designed to be completed and exchanged between local/regional schools and food banks prior to an emergency.

Name of school: _____

Address of school: _____

_____

Name of school feeding contact: _____

School feeding contact email address/phone number: _____

_____

Number of students enrolled: _____

Average number of students provided with food per day during normal operations: _____

Age groups served (check all that apply):

☐ Preschool

☐ Primary school

☐ Secondary school

☐ Other: _____

Description of high-risk populations served:

_____

_____

_____

Average distance from school to students' homes:

_____

Meals served during normal operations (check all that apply):

☐ In-school meal

☐ In-school snack

☐ In-school milk

☐ Take-home ration

Categories of food items typically included in school-provided meals/food packages (check all that apply):

☐ Grains, cereals

☐ Roots, tubers

☐ Legumes, pulses, nuts

☐ Dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese)

☐ Eggs

☐ Meat

☐ Poultry

☐ Fish

☐ Green leafy vegetables

☐ Other vegetables

☐ Fruits

☐ Oil

☐ Salt

☐ Sugar

☐ Other: _____

Fortified foods typically provided: ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, list: _____

_____

_____

Amenities that are present at the school
(check all that apply):

☐ Open cooking area

☐ Closed cooking area

☐ On-site water (not piped)

☐ Piped water

☐ Dry storage

☐ Electricity

☐ Refrigeration

☐ Freezer

☐ Charcoal or wood stove

☐ Gas stove

☐ Electric stove

☐ Dry storage space

☐ Active garden/growing space

Staff or volunteers with the following skills
(check all that apply):

☐ Food preparation

☐ Food safety

☐ Transportation

Number of vehicles that can be employed during an
emergency: _____

Name and contact information of community
organizations that support food distribution during
normal times:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Top three sources of food (list the name of
company/organization/business):

_____

_____

_____

Description of emergency food procurement and
distribution plans:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

During an emergency, contact School Food
Supervisor:

_____

at _____

or School Principal: _____

at _____

Information for food banks to share with schools and other local partners

Food banks and schools may both be positioned to provide nutrition services to children and families during emergencies. The following tool can help schools and food banks identify and document resources and capacities that they can leverage during emergencies. It is designed to be completed and exchanged between local/regional schools and food banks prior to an emergency.

Name of food bank: _____

Address of food bank: _____

_____

_____

Name of primary contact: _____

Contact email address/phone number:

_____

_____

Average number of adults served during normal operations: _____

Average number of children served during normal operations: _____

Description of high-risk populations served:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Average distance of food bank from homes of recipients: _____

Categories of food items typically included in food bank distribution (check all that apply):

☐ Grains, cereals

☐ Roots, tubers

☐ Legumes, pulses, nuts

☐ Dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese)

☐ Eggs

☐ Meat

☐ Poultry

☐ Fish

☐ Green leafy vegetables

☐ Other vegetables

☐ Fruits

☐ Oil

☐ Salt

☐ Sugar

☐ Other: _____

Fortified foods typically provided: ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, list: _____

_____

Amenities that are present at the food bank (check all that apply):

☐ Open cooking area

☐ Closed cooking area

☐ On-site water (not piped)

☐ Piped water

☐ Dry storage

☐ Electricity

☐ Refrigeration

☐ Freezer

☐ Charcoal or wood stove

☐ Gas stove

☐ Electric stove

☐ Dry storage space

☐ Active garden/growing space

Staff or volunteers with the following skills
(check all that apply):

☐ Food preparation

☐ Food safety

☐ Transportation

Number of vehicles that can be employed during an
emergency: _____

Name and contact information of community
organizations that support food distribution during
normal times:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Top three sources of food (list the name of
company/organization/business):

_____

_____

_____

Description of emergency food procurement and
distribution plans: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

During an emergency, contact:

_____

at _____

or _____

at _____

Safe food distribution guide for food banks and schools

Use the following guide to develop protocols for safe food distribution during a pandemic or public health emergency. Protocols should be adapted and defined for procurement, food safety management, transportation, and worker protection.

QUESTIONS	IMPLICATIONS
Who is being fed?	
Will the emergency program provide food only for the child(ren) in the household who would have been fed at school under normal circumstances?	If yes, then make sure that the food products provided to the child(ren) are in easy-open packaging, ready to eat (or require no more than simple microwaveable preparation), and easy to carry.
Will the emergency program provide food for out-of-school children? Siblings under the age of 5? The entire household?	If serving out-of-school children and siblings under the age of 5, then follow the guidelines in the previous question. If serving the entire household, then the types of food provided can be more varied in terms of packaging and required preparation can be more complex. Verify the household's storage capacity (i.e., is there refrigeration?) to determine whether you can include perishable items.
How will food be distributed?	
Will food be delivered to students' homes?	If yes, then make sure to have a reliable team of volunteers and/or staff who have some basic training in how to relate with the children and their parents/guardians when making the delivery. It is important that the volunteers/staff understand the stress that the beneficiaries are under and that they present themselves with positive attitudes and compassion. If no, then assume that the students and/or their parents/guardians will be collecting the food. See next question.
Will food be collected from a school or another safe space by students or parents/guardians?	If yes, then ensure that the collection site is properly set up to accommodate a flow of traffic (by foot or car) that is easy to follow and will not create congestion. This is important for maintaining social distancing protocols, efficient distribution, and appropriate recordkeeping.

QUESTIONS	IMPLICATIONS
How will food be distributed?	
If beneficiaries are collecting food from a school or another safe space, will they walk or have other means of transportation?	If beneficiaries are walking or taking public transportation, then the food should be packaged in easy-to-carry containers such as shopping bags or tote bags. If they are traveling by car, the food can be packaged in boxes.
What is the distance between beneficiaries' homes and food distribution sites?	If the distance is too far for some beneficiaries, then have a team of volunteers and/or staff who can deliver the food to the beneficiary's home.
How much will the meal or food package weigh?	Weight is an important consideration—especially for beneficiaries who are walking or taking public transportation.
How will food be packaged?	Give thought to how the food will be collected/delivered. Packaging appropriate to the transport mode, as indicated above, is important.
How often will food be distributed to each beneficiary? Daily, weekly, or some other schedule?	Whatever schedule is established, make sure that it can be consistently followed. Consider issues like how and where the food is being procured as well as the process to bring it to the distribution point and to package it for distribution. The commitment that is being made to the beneficiaries is one they will trust in, and it is important to honor that commitment with consistency.
Is the route to the food distribution site safe (i.e., crime, harassment, distance, etc.)?	If it is not, investigate the possibility of delivering all packages to the beneficiaries' homes. Alternatively, investigate the possibility of support from the police or a security firm on the days of distribution.
How will food be safely prepared and consumed?	
At what temperature will the food be prepared and distributed? **What is the time between food preparation, distribution, and consumption?**	Food safety management is critical. If prepared foods are being distributed, they should ideally be served in a congregate setting at the point of production. If that is not possible, then the food should be chilled below 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4.4 degrees Celsius) before delivery and either reheated and consumed immediately upon receipt or placed back in refrigeration until mealtime when it will be reheated and consumed. The prepared food should never be held at an ambient temperature (unrefrigerated) for more than two hours. Obtain expertise from local chefs, caterers, or government health authorities to ensure that no beneficiary's health is jeopardized by poor food safety administration.

QUESTIONS	IMPLICATIONS
How will food be safely prepared and consumed?	
Does the food need to be reheated? **If so, will beneficiaries have a reasonable capacity to reheat the food?** **Is a parent/guardian or caretaker available to oversee reheating to ensure safety?**	If the prepared food has been delivered or collected for consumption in the home at a later time, it will have to be reheated. Ensure that the household has the capacity to reheat the food before giving it to the beneficiary. Also, make sure that the household has a parent/guardian or caretaker to oversee the food's reheating and serving.
Do beneficiaries have refrigerated storage capacity for multiple days' worth of meals?	If not, then do not provide any products that require refrigeration. Perishable products such as baked goods, fruits and vegetables, and eggs (in most countries outside the United States) can be provided without the need for refrigeration, but nothing that requires refrigeration should be included in the package.
If the distributed food is meant to be cooked or prepared at home: - **Do beneficiaries have cooking facilities?** - **Do beneficiaries have clean, potable water?** - **Is a parent/guardian or responsible adult available to oversee safe cooking?**	If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then food that requires cooking should not be provided. Answering "yes" to every question is needed to provide food that requires cooking.
If beneficiaries lack refrigerated storage capacity, can fresh fruits and vegetables be sourced and provided in sufficient quantity to meet nutritional needs?	Fresh fruits and vegetables are valuable sources of nutrition, as are eggs. (Eggs do not require refrigeration in most countries outside the United States.) Many fruits and vegetables can be stored at an ambient temperature. Ensure that the fruits and vegetables provided do not require refrigeration.

Endnotes

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