



## FACT SHEET: SUMMER MEALS

For many kids, summertime means food, friends and fun. For families who count on school breakfast and lunch, however, the summer months can be stressful and family food budgets have to be stretched even further.

Free summer meals, funded by the USDA, are available to kids and teens ages 18 and under at thousands of summer meals sites across the country. This program has lots of room to grow:

- In 2015, of the more than 20 million kids in the U.S. who participated in the National School Lunch Program, only 3.2 million of them were served summer meals.<sup>1</sup>
- Only 40% of families report being aware of locations where summer meals are served. However, when surveyed, 68% say they are interested in the program.<sup>2</sup>
- Of those families that have participated in summer meals, 90% say they would recommend attending the site to others and are interested in continued participation.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies show that kids are at a higher risk for both hunger and obesity during the summer months.

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture funds free summer meals through the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program.

- Families can text 'FOOD' (English) or 'COMIDA' (Spanish) to 877-877; or call 1-866-3-HUNGRY (English) or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (Spanish) to find free summer meals nearby.
- Meals are free to kids and teens ages 18 and under.
- Meals are served at thousands of sites across the U.S. that are registered with the USDA and are at safe places, such as schools, churches, and community centers.
- Sites are located in areas where 50% or more of children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Many sites offer fun learning and recreational activities, as well as free food.
- Meals served follow USDA nutrition guidelines.
- Barriers to participation include a lack of accessible summer meals sites, transportation issues due to family work schedules, not being aware of the programs, and worrying about safety of sites.
- Families don't need to apply to the program or show proof of income.

## SHARE OUR STRENGTH'S NO KID HUNGRY CAMPAIGN

In the world's wealthiest nation, no child should grow up hungry. Over the course of a year, however, more than 15 million children in America cannot count on having enough nutritious food. That's one in six kids in America today who live in families impacted by hunger.

The No Kid Hungry Campaign® catalyzes innovative coalitions among governors, mayors, businesses, chefs, teachers and community leaders across the country to connect families at risk of hunger with the programs that can help them.

Combining access with education, we also teach families how to cook healthy, affordable meals through our Cooking Matters® program.

Together, we are making No Kid Hungry a reality in America. Learn more at [www.nokidhungry.org/](http://www.nokidhungry.org/).



## WAYS YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Summer meals programs across the country provide kids and teens with free, healthy meals so that they can continue to learn and grow during the summer. You can help. Now that summer vacation is upon us, you can:

- **Get social.** Donate your Facebook status or Twitter post to spread the word about free summer meals.
- **Advocate.** Become an advocate for the campaign by writing a letter to the editor.
- **Spread the word.** Promote the texting and phone hotlines to help children and families locate summer meals sites in your community, and download flyers to promote summer meals at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/>.
- **Support us.** Make a donation to help support the No Kid Hungry campaign.

Make sure there's No Kid Hungry this summer. Go to <https://www.nokidhungry.org/> to take action.

To learn more about summer meals programs, go to the No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/free-summer-meals-kids>.

## PARENTS ON SUMMER MEALS

*"If this program was in my area, I would take my children there."*

*"Kids eat up everything in the house during the summer. Feeding everyone kills your budget in the summer."*

*"I think programs like that are essential—necessary. We can't have kids going hungry...adults often need help."*

\*From focus groups conducted in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, AR; Denver, CO; and Baltimore, MD. Learn more at <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/summer-meals-survey-findings>.

<sup>1</sup>Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2016. Food Research & Action Center.

<sup>2</sup>2013 Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey. APCO Insight.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.