

MICROREPORT

# SUMMER HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES

## The challenges and solutions for Summer 2022

Summer should be a time of fun, food and friends. All kids deserve a happy, hunger-free summer.

Unfortunately, for many children, summer is also one of the hungriest times of the year. When the academic year ends, many students lose access to free and low-cost school meals they received as part of the school day. Many kids miss out on consistent, essential nutrition. And higher grocery bills can put a real strain on families already struggling to make ends meet.

It doesn't have to be this way. The federal summer meals programs exist to help fill this gap, allowing schools and community groups across the country to offer summer meals for kids. But outdated regulations and red tape can make it hard to meet the need.

For years, community groups have said they needed more program flexibility to reach more of the kids who needed meals. The pandemic allowed us to test that - and it was successful. Congress authorized the USDA to grant waivers during the pandemic so schools and organizations could modernize their programs – allowing sites to open in more neighborhoods, drop meals off at a child's home or let families pick up enough meals to cover multiple days at a time. This helped to reach thousands more kids with the food they need.

These waivers expire in June 2022, and we are in danger of seeing this progress erased. It's time to use these lessons to permanently update the summer meals program so it continues to work effectively and efficiently.

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According to estimates, kids could **miss out on** as many as

**95 million**

meals this summer.

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# The Barriers

The national summer meals program was created to help kids get healthy food when school is out. But local communities have historically faced barriers in connecting kids with summer meals. For example, by law, summer programs must operate under a “congregate” model, meaning kids must gather together at a specific time and place each day to eat as a group. This means many kids miss out on these meals due to barriers like:



**Restrictive Serving Rules** – Kids must eat meals at the site at a specific time of day, which may not align with parent work schedules.



**Lack of Transportation** – Getting kids to summer meal sites is more difficult in the summer when school buses don't run. Many sites are miles away from a child's home and serve meals during the day when many parents are working.



**Weather** – Many sites operate outdoors and are forced to close during extreme heat, tornadoes and storms.



**Limited Eligibility** – Open sites, with meals available to all children, are only able to operate in communities where 50% or more of kids qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.

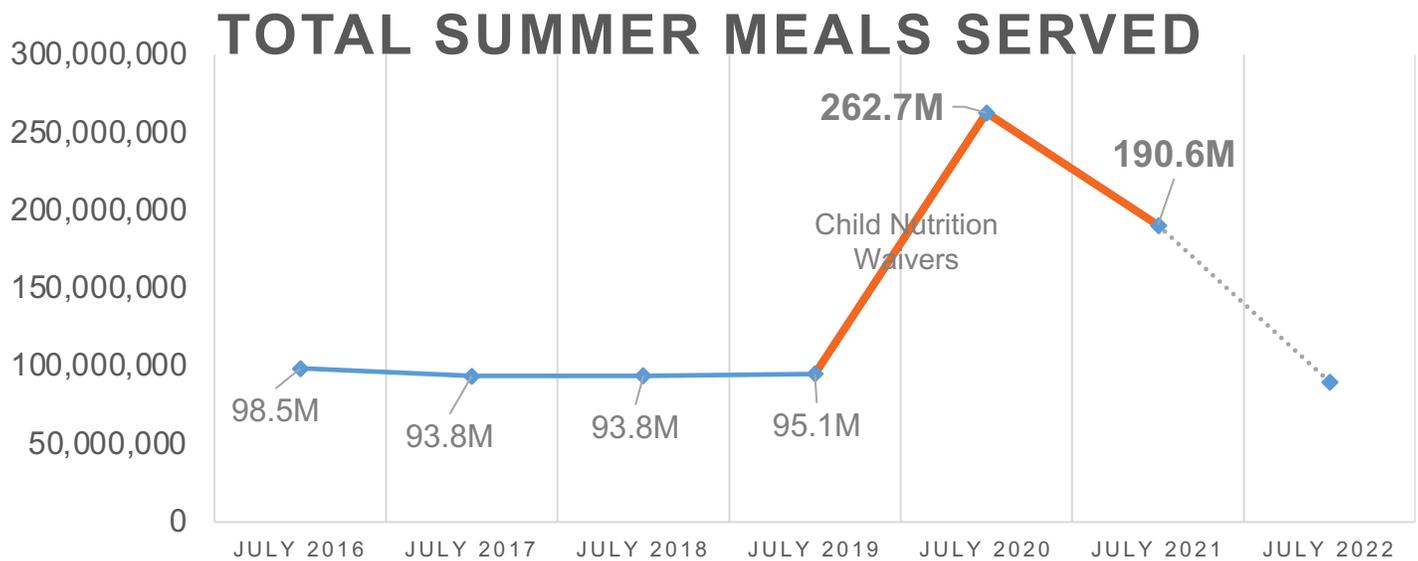


**Red Tape** – Bureaucracy and confusing rules for staff to navigate can discourage many organizations from participating.

This has serious implications. Without consistent access to the food they need, kids face a higher risk of health problems, learning loss, and diminished overall wellbeing.

# The Consequences

The number of summer meals served in July 2020 was nearly triple the number served in July 2019. And even once communities began re-opening in 2021, the number of summer meals served in July 2021 was still double the number served in 2019. [See “Methodology” at the end of this report for more details.]



Most of the nationwide child nutrition waivers put into place during the pandemic expire in July, making it harder for kids and families to access meals this summer.

One waiver allowed sites open to all children to operate anywhere, even in more mixed-income neighborhoods. When this waiver expires, it could jeopardize access to summer meals for nearly 7 million children. [See the next page for a state-by-state breakout, with a methodology at the end of this report for more details.]



**6 out of 7**

kids who may have needed summer meals pre-pandemic were missing out.



**305% increase**

The number of summer meals served in rural areas rose 305% in 2020 compared to 2019, No Kid Hungry analysis shows.

According to USDA data, there were 67,224 open sites in 2021. Based on Share Our Strength estimates, approximately one out of every 5 of those sites (13,436) is unlikely to be eligible to serve meals to all kids in 2022.

State	2021 Open Sites	Sites unlikely to be eligible in 2022	Number of kids without access
<b>AK</b>	111	31	12,816
<b>AL</b>	1,171	137	87,631
<b>AR</b>	489	37	26,050
<b>AZ</b>	630	77	38,519
<b>CA</b>	5,469	1,024	738,902
<b>CO</b>	815	247	200,528
<b>CT</b>	671	231	105,428
<b>DC</b>	189	12	5,632
<b>DE</b>	331	64	37,462
<b>FL</b>	4,239	583	486,059
<b>GA</b>	3,494	403	280,954
<b>HI</b>	171	34	12,442
<b>IA</b>	619	222	75,052
<b>ID</b>	284	50	20,226
<b>IL</b>	2,162	407	274,464
<b>IN</b>	697	100	58,643
<b>KS</b>	722	254	107,933
<b>KY</b>	2,412	181	83,816
<b>LA</b>	965	52	37,383
<b>MA</b>	2,190	1,168	468,325
<b>MD</b>	1,178	254	125,128
<b>ME</b>	777	283	65,665
<b>MI</b>	2,099	374	205,379
<b>MN</b>	1,253	454	212,289
<b>MO</b>	1,359	127	45,371

State	2021 Open Sites	Sites unlikely to be eligible in 2022	Number of kids without access
<b>MS</b>	511	24	14,697
<b>MT</b>	263	66	21,324
<b>NC</b>	1,659	366	254,514
<b>ND</b>	166	90	38,831
<b>NE</b>	273	61	20,894
<b>NH</b>	72	24	10,700
<b>NJ</b>	2,986	1,121	477,111
<b>NV</b>	744	155	113,435
<b>NY</b>	1,727	236	128,786
<b>OH</b>	3,193	750	315,185
<b>OK</b>	1,070	97	53,378
<b>OR</b>	1,050	240	116,930
<b>PA</b>	3,993	1,199	445,070
<b>RI</b>	73	6	4,662
<b>SC</b>	1,165	169	122,649
<b>SD</b>	108	27	16,950
<b>TN</b>	2,297	248	114,471
<b>TX</b>	6,873	469	369,191
<b>UT</b>	179	35	19,231
<b>VA</b>	1,052	147	72,869
<b>VT</b>	289	149	31,482
<b>WA</b>	1,837	639	282,216
<b>WI</b>	366	132	59,103
<b>WV</b>	504	36	18,131
<b>WY</b>	277	144	41,182
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,224</b>	<b>13,436</b>	<b>6,975,089</b>

# What Works

- 1. SPREAD THE WORD.** With so many sites closing this year, many families will need a hand with information about where to find meals for kids. No Kid Hungry is operating a texting service to help. Families and community leaders can text 'FOOD' or 'COMIDA' to 304-304 for information.
- 2. EXTEND THE WAIVERS.** Congress must immediately extend the USDA's nationwide child nutrition waiver authority so schools and community organizations can continue to cope with severe supply chain challenges, labor shortages and continued uncertainty.
- 3. EXPAND ELIGIBILITY FOR MORE SITES.** Congress must permanently update the summer meals program through the Child Nutrition Reauthorization process. Lowering the threshold for sites to qualify as "area eligible" would allow more communities to serve summer meals to all kids who need a meal.
- 4. ALLOW FLEXIBILITY IN WHERE KIDS EAT THEIR MEALS.** Congress must also provide a "non-congregate option" to allow children to eat meals off-site or receive meals for multiple days at one time. Current "congregate sites" would remain open and supported, but this would allow more flexibility around where kids eat.
- 5. PERMANENTLY AUTHORIZE SUMMER EBT NATIONWIDE.** Provide a modest additional grocery benefit for parents with children who receive free or reduced-price meals at school. This benefit helps families directly purchase the food their kids need over the summer break.
- 6. STREAMLINE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE RED TAPE.** Streamline the federal afterschool meals program and the federal summer meals program to reduce administrative burdens, foster greater efficiency and ultimately reach more kids with the food they need.





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## About No Kid Hungry

No child should go hungry in America. But 1 in 6 kids in the United States face hunger today. No Kid Hungry is working to end childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all kids the healthy food they need to thrive. This is a problem we know how to solve.

No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty.

## Methodology

The Impact of Area Eligibility Waivers analysis uses a USDA list of the number of open summer sites in 2021 that were open at least one day from June 20th to August 10th. Then we estimated which sites would be eligible to operate as open sites in 2022 two ways: 1) we compared the site locations to census area eligibility data and 2) the free and reduced-price enrollment data for the closest school to each site as proxy for school attendance zone.

The “Number of kids without access” figures are calculated as the total enrollment of the schools that are closest to each site that may not be eligible in 2022 (we count each school only once if two summer sites have the same closest school). For MD, ME, MI and VA, the list of sites comes from the relevant state agencies rather than USDA. All figures here are estimates, and we have more confidence in the “Sites unlikely to be eligible in 2022” figures than the “Number of kids without access” figures.

Also, through this report, the term “summer meals” references breakfast, lunch, snack and/or supper served through programs including the Summer Food Service Program, the Seamless Summer Option, the National School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program.

