

What are schools doing to feed students during COVID-19-related closures?

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As schools across the United States are grappling with remote and hybrid learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, investigates the initial responses of

child nutrition administrative agencies in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia (DC), five US territories, and the US Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).

"Our aim was to conduct a novel assessment of the responses and communications of these 57 unique jurisdictions," said lead author Gabriella M. McLoughlin, Ph.D., Implementation Science Center for Cancer Control and Prevention Research Center, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, St Louis, MO, USA.

"Based on our systematic coding of government websites (February-May 2020), we found most jurisdictions [kindergarten through 12th-grade] mentioned school meal provisions in school closure announcements; provided easily interpretable information and/or maps about meal sites; and included detailed information about school meal provisions in their COVID-19 landing webpages. Fewer provided updated and comprehensive implementation guidance; referenced school closures in emergency declarations; had clear communication/outreach to families; or partnered with anti-hunger organizations," added Dr. McLoughlin.

Although it is not surprising none of the jurisdictions examined executed a comprehensive plan to address food insecurity during a pandemic of this nature and school closures of this duration, the initial responses to COVID-19 should serve as important foundations for lessons learned as this pandemic persists and as jurisdictions work to better plan for future emergencies. Without question, ensuring participation in emergency school meal programs is of paramount concern as the COVID-19 pandemic-related [school](#) closures continue to place children and families at a greater risk for food insecurity. Innovative approaches are needed to mitigate increased [food insecurity](#) and help schools prevent further financial losses due to lack of participation.

"Translating this evidence into action is so important and the Society for

Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB), among others, can play an instrumental role in establishing stronger communication pathways between students, families, schools, and governing entities," emphasized co-author and Society of Nutrition Education and Behavior Board member, Sheila Fleischhacker, Ph.D., JD, RDN, Georgetown Law, Washington, DC, USA.

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