Dairy products are an important source of nutrients for children’s growth, development and learning. Milk and dairy products provide essential nutrients, including carbohydrates, protein, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin, niacin and vitamins A, D, and B12. Summer Nutrition Program sponsors should make all efforts to include milk as part of meals to comply with the meal pattern and ensure children receive key nutrients. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, sponsors may encounter issues with sourcing or distributing milk. The strategies below may assist sponsors in ensuring children receive the most complete nutrition possible. If you have questions regarding sourcing or distributing milk, please contact your [Zone teams](https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/who-we-are) or [Summer Nutrition Program Consultants](https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/programs/sfsp).

**General**

* Utilize plain or flavored milk of any percent fat content (whole, reduced 2% fat, low fat 1% or skim) to ensure that available milk is provided as part of complete meals for children. [Plain or flavored milk of any percent fat content is permissible with the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meal pattern.](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/meal-patterns)
* Explore purchasing from additional/other vendors if consistent ability to source milk is an issue. A list of North Carolina dairy farmers that have the capacity to process and directly sell milk and other dairy products is available in a vendor folder in the SFSP Download Forms section of the School Nutrition Technology System (SNTS). In addition, a list of dairy processors in North Carolina able to contract sell to schools is available in the SFSP Download Forms section of the SNTS.
* Consider using bulk milk (quarts, 1/2 gallons and gallons) for multiple meals served to students over the course of a few days with every effort to continue to meet the meal pattern requirements.([See conversion chart from the Dairy Farmers of Washington](https://wadairy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Milk-Servings-Conversion-Chart-DFW-v6.pdf).) Per USDA [SP 13-2020 Memo, Child Nutrition Program Nationwide Waivers; Questions and Answers](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SP13-2020s-a.pdf), sponsors may provide bulk milk as long as individual meals are easily identifiable as a reimbursable meal. When using such a delivery mechanism, sponsors:
  + Must include the required food components in the proper minimum amounts for each reimbursable meal being claimed,
  + Must ensure that food items are clearly identifiable as making up reimbursable meals,
  + Are strongly encouraged to provide menus with directions indicating which items are to be used for each meal and the portion sizes, and
  + Should consider whether households have access to refrigeration when providing food that requires refrigeration.
* Strive to keep milk at 35°F. The shelf life of milk is shortened by 50% for every five degree increase in temperature over 40°F. [See guidance from The Dairy Alliance regarding correct storage temperature.](https://thedairyalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Strive-for-35-Cold-Milk-Fact-Sheet.pdf)
* Source shelf-stable milk, if available, to include with meals to alleviate issues when temperature control is difficult or not possible.
* Work as a team to move milk. Ask for assistance from Maintenance, Custodial or Security staff.
* Be careful to lift with your legs and not your back to prevent injury when lifting coolers. It is also important to bend at the knees and not at or from the waist.
* Consider using lifting straps and harnesses which can make moving heavy items easier and safer. Maintenance departments may already have these or other tools which can make moving heavy loads easier.

**Meal Preparation**

* Keep milk under refrigeration until time for service.
* Freeze or partially freeze milk prior to distribution to maintain safe temperatures during distribution. Try freezing milk beforehand in the available containers (cartons or jugs) to test performance. [Review guidance from Dairy Management, Inc. regarding freezing milk.](https://www.usdairy.com/news-articles/can-you-freeze-milk) Consult with the local health department regarding safe procedures for providing frozen milk to children.
* Transfer refrigeration/cold storage equipment (i.e., milk boxes, refrigerated trucks, etc.) to operating meal sites to increase capacity to store additional milk for meal service.

**Meal Distribution/Pick-Up, Drive-thru or Delivery**

* Use coolers to transport milk from the preparation area to the distribution area or delivery vehicles. Aim to efficiently pack coolers. For example, if using ½ pints, alternate rows of right side up and upside-down cartons.
* Add ice to coolers to keep milk cold or employ reusable ice packs/flexible ice blankets in coolers to keep milk cold for meal distribution. Reusable ice packs/flexible ice blankets reduce the need for bags of ice.
* Utilize two or four crate COLD-SELL® merchandising barrels to transport milk from the preparation area to the distribution area or delivery vehicles.
* Use dollies, carts and ramps to move coolers or milk barrels to the distribution area or onto delivery vehicles.
* Work with Maintenance staff to secure or create ramps to help load coolers or milk barrels onto vehicles.
* Utilize buses equipped with wheelchair lifts. Lifts can be used to load milk coolers or barrels onto buses.
* Pull delivery vehicles up to a loading dock for easier transfer of milk.
* If using larger containers of milk (i.e., quart, ½ gallon or gallon), move milk out to the buses on carts or dollies and hand milk containers two at a time up to staff on the bus.
* Inquire if milk processors would be willing to deliver milk to meal sites or assist with bulk milk deliveries.
* Consider storing milk at a central warehouse. Transport vehicles can stop by the warehouse to pick up milk as drivers head out onto delivery routes. Lifts at the warehouse can be used to lift milk up to the buses or other delivery vehicles. Vehicles can pull up to a loading dock to make transferring the milk easier.
* Utilize refrigerated trucks to transport milk. The Summer Nutrition Program may be able to use school district trucks, rent trucks or utilize trucks donated from community partners.
* Load the transport vehicles carefully to prevent movement of coolers, etc. If using COLD-SELL® barrels with freezer panels, secure them inside vehicles for transporting milk to prevent the barrels from rolling while the vehicle is in motion.
* If overhead storage space is available on buses, use this space to store lighter weight meal components, freeing up floor and seat space for coolers. Prioritize seat space for other meal components to free up floor space for heavier coolers.
* Leave the lid on coolers or COLD-SELL® barrels between serving to keep milk as cold as possible.