

## **MEAL COUNTING AND CLAIMING SYSTEMS**

In order to obtain federal reimbursement for meals served, trained adults must accurately count, record and claim the number of meals actually served to eligible participants.

RCCIs must have a Policy Statement approved by the SA before any meal count system is implemented. (Please refer to the Policy Statement section for specific requirements.) Also, all food service personnel must be adequately trained before starting any child nutrition program. There is an example of a meal count policy in Appendix O.

The essential components of a good counting and claiming system are the point of service meal count and the recording and reporting procedures.

### **Any system in place must provide a "point of service" meal count:**

- of reimbursable meals served;
- by type (free, reduced price and paid);
- each day; and
- without overtly identifying students receiving meal benefits.

There are different ways to count meals served by category, but the most common tool used in RCCIs with day student is the check-off list.

### **Check-Off List**

Check-off lists indicate the names of all eligible students, by category, and are used at the point of service to record the number of reimbursable meals served. Please see sample check-off list in Appendix K. As each child is served a meal, his/her name is checked off on the list. At the end of the service, check marks are added up, by category, to determine the daily meal count.

Check-off lists must be kept up-to-date and must accurately reflect the correct eligibility category of students. The names of children who have withdrawn from the institution should be marked off, and the date of withdrawal should be noted. Newly enrolled students must be added and the date noted. For RCCIs whose students are all institutionalized, point-of-service may be done as simply as an "X" or a hash mark on a sheet of paper for each child being served a first meal. The paper must include the date and the type of meal being counted and maintained as documentation of numbers claimed for that meal on that date.

If residents are served family style, the information may be completed at the table. Any other variation to point-of-service counting should be approved by the State Agency.

### **Weekend Reimbursement**

RCCIs can continue to receive reimbursement under the SBP and NSLP on the weekends. Reimbursement is made on a "per day of operation" basis. Therefore, reimbursement may be claimed for eligible meals served any day that an institution is approved to provide its services. Unless the RCCI has full documentation of the meal, including production records, recipes, etc., showing that the meal has met the meal pattern requirements, they should not claim a meal for reimbursement.

### **RCCI Sack Lunches Sent to Schools**

In order for RCCIs to claim sack lunches sent to school with the institutionalized students, it must ensure that the

school is not already claiming lunch for those children. RCCIs may claim such sack lunches if there is evidence that children would not otherwise be served a nutritious lunch or would not be served at an appropriate time. If appropriate, Offer versus Serve (OvS) should be exercised at the time the meal is packed at the RCCI, and should be packed, stored, and served under strict sanitary conditions to avoid contamination. OvS requirements are discussed in the Menu Planning section of this manual.

### **Non-Reimbursable Meals**

The following items are **not** reimbursable and must not be included in the meal counts reported on the Claim for Reimbursement.

- Evening meals like supper
- Meal supplements such as snacks UNLESS on the After School Snack Program
- Adult meals
- Second meals eaten by eligible children
- A la carte items
- Meals given to day students to take home
- Meals not meeting the meal pattern requirements, e.g. a tray with only soup for an ill child
- Meals served to children of house parents
- Pitch in meals provided by families or communities that do not meet the meal pattern

### **Quick Guide to Reimbursable Meal Periods**

	<b>Holidays</b>	<b>Weekends</b>	<b>Summer</b>	<b>Regular Week</b>
<b>Breakfast</b>	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim
<b>Lunch</b>	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim	Allowed to claim
<b>After School Snack</b>	ONLY if regular school is in session, can you claim. If regular school is not in session, you cannot claim.	ONLY if regular school is in session, can you claim. If regular school is not in session, you cannot claim.	ONLY if regular school is in session, can you claim. If regular school is not in session, you cannot claim.	ONLY if regular school is in session, can you claim. If regular school is not in session, you cannot claim.

### **Internal Controls**

An RCCI must establish internal controls to identify potential problems in the meal count system and to ensure that an accurate Claim for Reimbursement has been made. Internal controls protect RCCIs from having erroneous claims and potential over claims. Edits and monitoring are the two required internal controls.

**Edit Checks** - Daily meal counts should be entered on an edit-check sheet which is a mandatory record for schools and RCCIs. The daily meal count sheet is included in Appendix L. The attendance factor for RCCI is considered to be 100 percent, because students reside in the facility and would not be "absent."

**Monitoring** - Every school year, each RCCI with more than one site/building must perform at least one On-Site Review of each site under its jurisdiction. The on-site review must take place prior to February 1 of each school year. Furthermore, if the review discloses problems with a site's meal counting or claiming procedures, the RCCI must: 1) ensure that the site corrects the problem; and 2) within 45 days of the review, conduct a follow-up on-site review to determine that the problem has been corrected. Please contact the SA for monitoring procedures and

review forms.

**Written Instruction** - It is highly recommended that each site within an RCCI maintain written instructions for all personnel which detail the operation of the meal count system and the responsibilities and duties of each person involved. See Appendix O.

### **Reimbursement Claim**

The Claim for Reimbursement and instructions are found in the online CNPweb system. The information used to complete this form will be obtained from the RCCI's point-of-service counting records, which have been consolidated on the daily meal count sheet. While only the Claim for Reimbursement is filed with the SA, it is required that all evidence be maintained on file to substantiate the data reported on the claim. This includes all participation records.

Submit the original Claim for Reimbursement as soon as possible after the month is over, but within 60 days after the end of the month for which the claim applies. It is important to remember that any claim submitted later than 60 days after the end of the claiming month will only be approved upon submitting a "one-time exception" explanation by letter or email. Sponsors get only one 'one-time exception' in a 3-year period.

### **Question about Meal Counting and Claiming Systems**

**Q: May RCCIs claim NSLP reimbursement for meals served at supper time or in the evening which meet the school lunch pattern, provided that reimbursement has not already been claimed for a prior lunch?**

A: No. A lunch served under the NSLP is defined as a meal served to children around mid-day, specifically between the hours of ten and two o'clock. A meal served at a time which is traditionally considered the last meal of the day would not be in accordance with this requirement and would not be eligible for reimbursement.

**Q: May RCCIs use the morning count for meal choices instead of counting when the children are picking up their meal?**

A: No, children who were counted in the morning might not be eating when it is lunch time or there might be new children eating who were not counted earlier. Meals must be counted only when the child receives the reimbursable meal.

**Q: How do RCCIs count children who do not receive meals at the normal point of service (for instance, the child is in a detention center and is not allowed to eat with the normal population)?**

A: Every attempt should be made to keep track of the number of reimbursable meals provided as they are given to the children.

## **Technical Assistance**

Each area of the state of Indiana has a School Nutrition Specialist assigned to assist sponsors in all aspects of program compliance. You can find the name of your field specialist by looking in the CNPweb on the Packet Tab. Your field specialist is available to assist you in menu planning, determining eligibility status, production records, as well as general program compliance. Sponsors are highly encouraged to get to know their field specialist and to use them as resource in your Child Nutrition Program planning.