

Food Insecure & Allergic

Adjusting to Meet Food Allergy Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

More than 32 million Americans, including at least 6 million children, must avoid certain foods to maintain their health due to food allergies or other medical conditions. This is often difficult under normal conditions due to cost and availability of allergen-free and gluten free foods.

The COVID-19 pandemic is increasing food insecurity by interrupting income, driving up food prices and creating supply chain problems that result in shortages of specialty foods. As more people with food allergies and celiac turn to the food safety net for help, will they find the medically required specialty infant formula, nut free butters, or gluten free staples they need?

Immediate action is needed to ensure that WIC, TEFAP and other emergency food programs can protect food security of those with food allergies, celiac disease or other medical concerns.



Summer Feeding Program & Senior Nutrition Program Meals Currently, feeding sites for each of these programs are penalized for modifying meals to suit food allergies and celiac disease, receiving a reduced per-meal reimbursement. This means few sites offer safe meals for those with special dietary needs. The situation will likely worsen as feeding sites are combined to expedite distribution during the pandemic.

WHAT'S NEEDED It's critical that the **coordinating feeding site (likely schools)** request and receive the same reimbursement for meals that respond to special dietary needs so they can serve hungry seniors and children food they need to remain healthy. **State agencies** should work with feeding sites to ensure every community has a feeding site which can accommodate medically necessary diets.

TEFAP The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) frequently fails to offer foods that are free of the 9 most common allergens and are clearly labeled. More Americans will rely on these foods than ever before. It's crucial to ensure those with food allergies and celiac can access safe food.

WHAT'S NEEDED The **US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS)** should adjust procurement policies to ensure a minimum percentage of commodities purchased are allergen free and labeled in accordance with The Food Allergen Labeling & Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA).

WIC Currently, the guidelines for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) do not accommodate those with food allergies or celiac. Supply chain disruptions and store shortages resulting from the pandemic will worsen the situation.

WHAT'S NEEDED The **USDA FNS** should adjust the 100% whole wheat requirement to a 100% whole grain so that those with celiac disease can purchase safe food. The program should allow "up-to" sizing on WIC purchases so that shortages of an allowed size don't stop shoppers from getting what's needed.

Pantries Food banks and pantries are implementing pandemic protocols, including some which will reduce client choice (e.g. boxed distribution) making it less likely that those with food allergies can access the medically necessary food they need.

WHAT'S NEEDED **Food banks and pantries** should allow clients to indicate food allergies and other medically necessary dietary requirements on enrollment and food pick-up forms. Pantries should adopt food sorting and labeling procedures so that allergen free-foods are stored separately. Pantries and food banks that are unable to sort and label foods should help connect clients with services through Food Equality Initiative at (816) 800 0884.

[More information and resources at foodequalityinitiative.org](https://foodequalityinitiative.org) and kchealthykids.org.