# **Covid 19: Information for schools on Free School Meals, access to food and supporting families in food poverty**

Food and access to nutrition is of course a concern for schools and families during the coming months. This guidance aims to provide national and local information, advice and guidance for how to support your pupils and families to access meals and maintain a balanced diet. It will be important to support those who may be at risk or food poverty or who are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM).

**1.0 Free School Meals**

The Government has produced advice for schools on FSM today which can be read in full at the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

The advice for schools is:

**Contact your catering team.**

* Schools should speak to their school catering team (in house), or school catering provider to see if they can prepare meals or food parcels that could be delivered to, or collected by families.
* If schools use a private catering provider, contact them to see what alternative arrangements are available.

**Catering Leeds schools**

* If your school meals are provided by Catering Leeds (CL) then there is a plan in place to deliver 14,000 meals for means tested free school meal children (and families who are highlighted as vulnerable by Headteachers) every school day (Monday to Friday).
* Utilising 28 hubs across the city CL have established distribution points for each school to have their allocation collected from these sites or delivered directly where this is proving hard to arrange.
* The provision includes catering for all children who may have a special dietary requirement. To begin with we will be issuing a cold ‘grab bag’ lunch which will be vegetarian. Special diet children will receive a meal which excludes all of the 14 main allergens and, where necessary, a bespoke meal will be put in place for complex dietary needs.

**Supermarket vouchers**

* The DfE are currently developing a national approach to providing support through supermarket and shop vouchers. Further details will be provided shortly.
* If your school is closed and your school catering team cannot provide meals or food parcels, you should offer families of pupils eligible for free school meals an alternative.
* Schools can order supermarket and shop vouchers directly from a number of retailers – usually through your corporate division. They recommend sourcing vouchers for supermarkets or shops in the local area. **Where possible they should be restricted for use against age-related products.**
* Schools will get a choice of:
	+ e-vouchers (where available) - which you can email directly to parents
	+ gift cards - which may be more suitable if parents do not have access to the internet
* Schools should check which pupils are eligible and currently in receipt of free school meals, and vouchers should be made available to the parent or the adult with caring responsibility for that child.
* We recommend that vouchers are sent to schools with advice for parents and pupils to use them for a balanced meal each day, where possible, in line with the [Eatwell Guide.](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/)
* This is to help pupils maintain their health and good nutritional status.
* You could also send home copies of your current school lunch menu and recipes to help give parents and pupils ideas for meals.

**Additional costs**

* The DfE understands that some of these approaches may mean that schools and other educational establishments go to additional expense.
* DfE will provide further guidance shortly on how they will compensate schools who incur additional costs in providing free school meals or vouchers to pupils affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

**2.0 Food Banks**

The city will be upscaling its capacity to deliver food to people's homes.

An official referral system is being developed which we will aim to combine with the existing Welfare Support Scheme and will involve the Council linking people in with a range of providers including FareShare Yorkshire and a Business which has committed to delivering food parcels.

**Before this gets set up and running** **people can contact the Food Aid Network on** **mary@leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk** **or call 07903 123283 and they will ensure people who are in genuine need receive a delivery as we will work with this business to make this happen.**

Ideally this referral needs to be from an agency but discretion will be shown when people self-refer.

**For the latest and up to date information on food banks and similar services please visit** [**https://leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk/category/news/**](https://leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk/category/news/)

The following food banks have **temporarily been closed** due to measures put in place to slow the spread of [Covid 19](https://leedsfoodaidnetwork.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=845638af9cccef1b9b23f86a4&id=97dfc90925&e=db43a59ed8).

* Hunslet Methodist Church as of 18/3/2020
* Rothwell Fire Station as of 19/03/2020
* St John and St Barnabas Church, Belle Isle as of 20/3/2020
* St Cyprians Church, Harehills as of 23/03/2020
* St Andrews Church, Beeston as of 23/3/2020
* Drighlington Methodist Church as of 23/3/2020.

Emergency support will continue to be **available** at **(Still Open)**

* 4 Square Church, Osmondthorpe as of 19/3/2020
* St Pauls Church, Morley as of 24/3/2020
* St Richards Church, Seacroft as of 24/3/2020
* Church of the Epiphany, Gipton as of 24/3/2020
* St Cross Church, Middleton as of 24/3/2020.

Operations at **Leeds North and West Foodbank** remain open at their 9 outlets. Keep checking their website, <https://leedsnorthandwest.foodbank.org.uk/>

* **Holbeck Foodbank** remains operational for deliveries.
* **St Vincent**s is operational but on reduced staff. Please call when collecting a food parcel.
* **St George's Crypt Armley Shop** is still doing Food Parcels.
* **St George's Crypt** and **Lighthouse** have stopped serving food on a Lunchtime at the central venue.
* A number of **Street Kitchens** have changed their activities and are now circulating round the city more rather than staying still in one place. **Leeds Homeless Street Angels** will not be in operation due to ill health but will be back soon.

**3.0 Cooking at home and providing meals**

With many children spending additional time at home, they will be consuming more food and meals than usual. Families may want some advice on menu planning and cooking low-cost, simple meals that are healthy and nutritious for the whole family.

**Below are some useful tips and advice you may find helpful for your families and pupils**.

* You could send home copies of your school lunch menu to provide ideas for balanced weekly menus
* Encourage parents to batch cook dinners and freeze for quick meals during the week (as many parents may be working while caring for children).
* Involve children with meals times. Depending on their age and ability, children can help out with tasks such as washing vegetables, setting the table, peeling, mashing, chopping or mixing. Older pupils may even be able to plan and prepare full meals for the family.
* Go for at least one plant-based day a week, this can help to keep costs down and also to support a reduction in climate change and ease demand for meat and fish.
* Sticking to a routine of 3 meals plus 2 healthy snacks can provide helpful structure for children and also help them to maintain their energy throughout the day.
* Try to use non-food items for rewards such as praise, play time, stickers, family rewards, collective rewards (such as putting a piece of pasta in jar) or 1 to 1 time with a grown up.

**Below are some useful websites that may help with general advice for eating well and recipes for child-friendly and family meals.**

[**Change4life**](https://www.nhs.uk/change4life)
Fun and family friendly information for eating well and keeping active. Tips, ideas, recipes and games to help keep kids and adults happy and healthy. You can also encourage parents and pupils to download the free app and food scanner.

[**Food a Fact of Life**](https://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/)

Age-appropriate recipes for children, lessons and curriculum resources that parents can use at home to help educate their children about healthy eating, cooking and where food comes from.

[**NHS Choices Eatwell**](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/)
Information and advice on food, nutrition and the Eatwell Guide. This website also provides advice on digestive health, recipes ideas and guidance for teenagers.

[**British Heart Foundation**](https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/healthy-living/healthy-eating)

Recipes and advice on keeping healthy and eating a balanced diet for heart health.

**Food Wise Leeds**

A city-wide campaign to unify, promote and celebrate those delivering good food work across Leeds. Information on local food projects and initiatives. The FoodWise website has a recipe page with simple budget recipes from the **Cooking on a Shoestring** cookbook produced by Zest Leeds. All the recipes make easy delicious meals using basic fresh and store cupboard ingredients.

**4.0 Growing food at home**

With spring approaching, spending time outside as a family learning how to grow food, could be helpful for some families. Plants and vegetables can be grown in small or large spaces including windowsills, buckets, gardens, raised beds, containers and even old wellies. You could provide pupils with packs of seeds and plan home learning and projects around growing activities.

Schools could also contact local garden centres, community allotments and supermarkets to see if any support or resources are available.

**LESSN**

Leeds Edible Schools Sustainability Network (LESSN) provides links to wide range of resources suitable for schools and children, as well as videos for how to grow different types of vegetables.

**5.0 General advice and guidance for food and healthy eating in school or for families**

The Health and Wellbeing Service are still here to provide support for schools around nutrition, health eating, cooking and general advice on food. Please email schoolwellbeing@leeds.gov.uk or call 0113 3785254 and ask to speak with the Healthy Eating Adviser.

**You can also visit** [**www.schoolwellbeing.co.uk**](http://www.schoolwellbeing.co.uk) **or follow us on twitter at @schoolwellbeing and @healthyschools\_ for the latest advice and updates.**