

USDA INFANT AND PRESCHOOL MEAL PATTERN
IN SCHOOL PROGRAMS



Feeding Infants

This handout provides information about the infant feeding requirements under the Infant and Preschool meal pattern for School Food Authorities (SFAs) serving infants.

Infant Age Groups

- Birth through 5 months
- 6 months through 11 months

Offering Infant Meals

All infants enrolled for care must be offered meals that comply with the infant meal pattern requirements, including offering at least one type of iron-fortified infant formula. An SFA may not avoid this obligation by stating that the infant is not “enrolled,” or by citing logistical or cost barriers to offering infant meals.

Q&A:

Q: If an infant is just starting to be introduced to solid foods, such as infant cereal, does that solid food need to be served at every meal where that component is required?

A: Solid foods are introduced gradually, which means that it may be appropriate to serve the solid food only once per day and then gradually increase the number of feedings per day. The infant does not need to be offered a solid food component that is part of the meal pattern, such as vegetables and fruit, until the infant has established a tolerance for that solid food component at multiple feedings per day. It is important to remember that the quantity of food an infant consumes changes from feeding to feeding or day to day. Infants may want to eat less food when teething or not feeling well and more food on days when they have a very good appetite.

Birth through 5 months	6 through 11 months
4-6 fl oz breastmilk or formula	6-8 fl oz breastmilk or formula; and 0-4 T infant cereal, meat, fish, poultry, whole egg, cooked dry beans, or cooked dry peas; or 0-2 oz of cheese; or 0-4 oz (volume) of cottage cheese; or 0-4 oz of yogurt; or a combination of the above; and 0-2 T vegetable or fruit, or a combination of both

Promote Breastfeeding

Support mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants by encouraging them to supply breastmilk while their infant is in care, and offer a quiet, private area that is comfortable and sanitary when they breastfeed on-site. For more information on how to promote breastfeeding, refer to the [Ten Steps for Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Centers](#) resource kit.

Infant Formula

SFAs must offer at least one type of iron-fortified infant formula. The Food and Drug Administration considers an infant formula to be “iron-fortified” if it has 1 milligram of iron or more per 100 kilocalories.

Solid Foods (Complimentary Foods)

Introduction of Solid Foods

The updated infant age groups will help delay the introduction of solid foods until around 6 months of age, as most infants are typically not physically developed to consume solid foods until this time. Six to 8 months of age is a critical window for introducing solid foods to infants. By 7 to 8 months of age, infants should be consuming solid foods from all food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, protein foods, and dairy).

Developmentally Ready

Infants develop at different rates - meaning some infants may be ready to consume solid foods before 6 months of age and others may be ready after 6 months of age. **Once an infant is developmentally ready to accept solid foods, including infants younger than 6 months, SFAs are required to offer them to the infant.** For more information, refer to the DPI Community Nutrition Team’s [Developmental Readiness](#) handout.

Follow the Eating Habits of Infants

To claim a meal for an infant, all required components of that meal do not have to be served at the same time. As long as all the required food components are offered during a span of time that is consistent with the infant’s eating habits the meal is considered reimbursable.

New foods may be introduced one at a time over a few days, and an infant’s eating patterns may change. For example, an infant may eat a cracker one week and not the next. If an infant refuses a food, that is okay. The meal is still reimbursable.

It is important to remember that it is normal for infants to refuse new foods. Continue providing opportunities for infants to try new foods and get used to different flavors and textures. Offering infants a variety of food over the course of the week helps them get the nutrition they need. It can take time for infants to be introduced to and accept a variety of foods.

Recordkeeping Requirements

Records must document that infants following the infant meal pattern are being served meals that meet the meal pattern requirements. Visit the [Infants and Preschool in NSLP and SBP](#) webpage for downloadable recordkeeping templates for infant meals.



For more information on feeding infants, visit the [Infants and Preschool in NSLP and SBP](#) webpage.