



**For information**

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**Free Summer Meals Promotion Will Target City Neighborhoods  
in Need and Use of 2-1-1 to Find Locations Close to Home**

ROCHESTER, NY — A coordinated effort to entice more youth in the city of Rochester to take advantage of free, nutritious summer meals will continue for a second year with an emphasis on increasing awareness in neighborhoods of need and making the meal site list more readily available.

To help youth and parents better understand where and when meals are available, the list of meal sites will be available Monday, June 16, by calling 2-1-1. Neighborhoods where participation has been low will be targeted with details on the program in an effort to get more youth to stop by meal sites and eat more frequently during the summer months. There also are plans to connect with existing youth programs so that they can help promote the free summer meals among their participants.

Spearheading this effort is the Summer Meals Planning Committee, a collaboration of the City of Rochester, Foodlink, Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, Rochester Area Community Foundation, Rochester City School District, and other partners. Last summer, more than 325,889 meals were served to city youth 18 and younger over the course of the summer — an increase of 7,000 meals from 2012.

“We are once again involving all of our community partners to spread the word about when and where meals are available to ensure that more children and youth eat healthy meals during the months when school is not in session,” says Mairéad Hartmann, program officer at the Community Foundation.

A summer meals program is particularly important to the Rochester community because:

- The city has the seventh-highest child poverty rate in the nation, has the third highest concentration of extremely poor neighborhoods, and is the fifth poorest in the country among the top 75 metropolitan areas;
- Foodlink reported earlier this week that one in five children in the 10-county region has limited or uncertain access to adequate food and 12.8 percent of Monroe County residents are at risk of going hungry — the highest among all of the counties the local food bank serves; and

- A March 2013 report by the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) estimates that as many as 16,000 youth who receive free- and reduced-priced meals during the school year are not accessing the free meals offered at such sites as libraries, city recreation centers, schools, and churches.

“Foodlink is familiar with the increased need during the summer months when families cannot rely on school meals to feed their children,” says Jeanette Batiste, co-executive director of the region’s food bank. “We want to make sure that no child goes hungry in the city of Rochester.”

The availability of summer meals means that city youngsters can get free breakfast, lunch and sometimes dinner at locations in or near their own neighborhoods from June 30 to late August. Because of the city’s poverty level, all children under age 18 are eligible for free summer meals.

Begun in the mid-1970s and administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in conjunction with the New York State Department of Education, the program allows community-based organizations to participate, in addition to school districts and local governments.

All city recreation and community center sites offer free meals and are also “one-stop shops for our youth to have fun, stay active, and be healthy all summer long,” says Marisol Ramos-Lopez, commissioner of the Department of Recreation and Youth Services.

The City School District will again do its part to promote the availability of summer meals on its website and in communications sent home with students, including end-of-year report card mailings to parents. All schools that are open for summer school will be drop-in sites where youth who are not getting instruction can still receive free breakfast and lunch.

The Community Foundation has awarded \$18,000 in mini-grants to six current sites to expand their capacity to serve more youth by adding hours or days they offer meals or buying needed tables, chairs, refrigerators or coolers. These grants were meant to address issues raised by the CGR report, which found that summer meals in 2012 were distributed at 16 percent fewer sites than in 2011 and only open an average 22 days out of a possible 50 weekdays from late June through early August.

“Not only are summer meals a great way for kids to have fun with their friends, but they can help to curb the trend of summer weight gain by making sure they are filling up on healthy and tasty foods each day,” says Dina Faticone, Healthi Kids program manager at Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency.

