



Compiled Questions from 3/19 Webinar, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Hunger and Public Health Systems*, and Bread Team Responses

- **SUMMER MEALS:** Can Congress pass legislation that will provide every needy child with free meals this summer? Can every child who gets free meals during the school year, also receive them this summer?

In theory, Congress can pass legislation to make this happen. The question is how it would be implemented since Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines limit the size of group gatherings. The CDC could raise the maximum number of people who can gather, of course, but any limit under 100 people would rule out what's called congregate feeding—where children go to a central site, such as a local school or boys and girls club, to receive a meal. Even before the pandemic, congregate sites were only serving 3.7 million of the nearly 22 million children who live in food insecure households.

For both these reasons, Bread supports a different approach: increasing benefits during the summer months for households that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This approach is known as [Summer EBT](#) since EBT is the electronic benefit transfer card that people use to redeem SNAP benefits.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Bread and many other anti-hunger organizations were advocating for a \$50 million funding increase to pay for summer EBT for SNAP households with school-age children. Increased benefits would have been available to families starting in summer 2021. We expect to revisit this issue and change the funding request to match the greater needs that would accompany an expected economic downturn.

A note about **school-age children globally**: about half the world's student population—more than 860 million children and youth—are not attending classes because schools and universities have closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 100 countries have nationwide school closure while many other countries have localized closures that could become countrywide. The closures are devastating for children who depend on school for their only meal of the day. The food and nutrition needs of children and youth must be a top priority as developing country governments prepare to launch emergency safety net programs.

- **FOOD PANTRIES:** Are there resources for “best practices for local food pantries” during this crisis?

The best organization to answer this question is Feeding America. Here are some general things it suggests in light of the pandemic, and you may also visit their website:

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/how-feeding-america-network-food-banks-responding-coronavirus>

- **CHARITY RESPONSES:** Our weekend food backpack program for kids in our local grade schools will continue during the school closing. We still struggle to provide better nutrition, not simply calories, in the foods we provide because kids often need to self-prepare (adults working, etc.) Ideas from global work for better approaches?

We are unaware of any best practices globally, but we'll try our best to answer based on our working knowledge. We also recommend contacting Feeding America for their recommendations.

We recommend fresh fruits that are easily portable, storable, and don't need to be cut, such as apples, oranges, pears, strawberries, or grapes. Also, pre-cut veggies that can be eaten raw as snacks, such as celery with peanut butter or baby carrots with hummus.

Examples of meals that are easy to make in large quantities include baked chicken with broccoli and brown rice, or ground turkey with a baked sweet potato and spinach.

Another idea is to ask children what foods they are already comfortable preparing. It may make sense to give older children foods they can finish preparing themselves while continuing to give younger children fully prepared meals.

- **CHARITY RESPONSES:** What are best practices and innovative ways to deal with food distribution when community meals are shut down and pantries are closed? Our hunger action enabler has heard of a mobile food pantry through Gleaners and carry-out meals—any other ideas?

Bread is advocating that resources be made available to expand meal delivery services, including food banks. Home delivery workers are the anti-hunger community's first responders, and they should be supported and recognized for their critical efforts. Meals on Wheels has been doing amazing work, but most of its delivery people are elderly themselves. The United States cannot fulfill its responsibilities to homebound people by expecting people in a vulnerable group to volunteer their time.

- **OFFERING OF LETTERS:** Since public gatherings, such as faith services, have been restricted and the likelihood that having a face to face letter writing campaign will not be possible, will there be a flyer that congregations can post on their website with a link to write "on line" to their senators and representatives?

Bread for the World's Offering of Letters toolkit has several resources online at bread.org/toolkit. There is an electronic flyer, litanies, and fact sheets. They can easily be shared in an online meeting space such as Skype or Zoom, or discussed in a conference call. An electronic version of the Offering of Letter sample letter can be found on the main Offering of Letters page, bread.org/ol.

OFFERING OF LETTERS: How does the coronavirus crisis affect Bread's focus on the Offering of Letters asks for this year? In our Presbytery, we were planning a big push for the OL during the spring, so folks could deliver the letters at the June Summit. We will still encourage people to write letters while they are staying at home, although their delivery method is unknown at this point.

As we all work together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that we make strong investments in nutrition programs for the most vulnerable people in the United States and abroad. Malnutrition puts children and other vulnerable populations at greater risk of infection and other illnesses.

We are developing a two-part strategy to: 1) Respond to legislation as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds, and 2) Continue focusing on our Offering of Letters asks. Congregations across the country are developing plans as to how to conduct their Offering of Letters. Please reach out directly to the organizer in your region for ideas, and sign up for regional online discussions in March and April and regional online trainings in May. Visit www.bread.org/coronavirus for details.

- **MASS INCARCERATION:** Incarcerated juveniles and adults are at risk and we should not forget to advocate for protecting them from the dangers they face. In light of COVID-19, we should release elderly and those with little time left on their sentence.

Bread recognizes that prisons and jails throughout the country have been over-crowded for some time now. Bread has supported efforts to reduce the number of people who are incarcerated, such as through the most recent First Step Act in 2018. Bread is currently working in coalition with other faith-based national partners to advocate for compassionate release of those at higher risk in this pandemic; for release of people who have not been convicted of a crime; for consideration of release for people convicted of nonviolent offenses; and for increased resources for sanitation in facilities and support for proactive health measures aligned with CDC guidance.

Lastly, Bread and our partners recognize the importance of supporting individuals who have recently been released or will soon be released. They have very high rates of hunger and homelessness. Returning citizens also still face restrictions on their participation in safety net programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and public housing. We urge Congress to lift these restrictions during the pandemic.

- **PRICE GOUGING:** Globally expected business community takes advantage, do government policies plan to regulate practice to protect vulnerable groups. Is this in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act?

There have been cases of price gouging reported in the U.S. media, but most of it is not related to food. Rather, it's things such as hand sanitizer and toilet paper. It is illegal, but unfortunately, black markets appear when demand is not being met in regular markets. According to reports we have seen, food supplies are not endangered in the United States. Products are out of stock primarily because customers are hoarding.

Globally, price gouging by food companies is not a significant concern. The bigger problem is that food prices will rise if imports are curtailed. The 2008-2009 food price crisis, followed by another in 2011-2012, were triggered by climate change, conflict, and financial crisis. But there was plenty of food – production was not the problem. However, some of the major food exporting countries imposed export bans. This problem was never dealt with in the World Trade Organization negotiations or other institutional frameworks, so it could happen again.

- **FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT:** Explain replacement of Thrifty Food Plan with the Economy Food plan.

Bread will be coming out with a one-pager on this shortly. There is no Economy Food Plan—rather, it's called the Low-Cost Food Plan. The Thrifty Food Plan has been the basis for calculating SNAP benefits for decades, but it cannot meet people's nutritional needs. Bread has consistently advocated for its replacement. The Low-Cost plan would add about 25 percent more SNAP benefits for participating households.

YEMEN AND FOOD AID: March 25th marks the anniversary of the Yemen crisis: What language [is there in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act] to connect COVID-19 and cholera?

So far, we haven't seen specific language on this. One thing that contributes to both of them is lack of access to clean water. People whose immune systems have been weakened by another illness are more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Yemen's health system was already virtually non-existent and completely unable to cope with the ongoing cholera outbreak. COVID-19 will only further tax the little health infrastructure there is. Crowded conditions make it difficult or impossible for many people to practice social distancing.

We can expect that when COVID-19 starts to spread in Yemen, it will cause an increase in mortality, particularly among elderly poor people. Other vulnerable people, including pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children, are also at greater risk. Food and nutrition support for people in all these vulnerable groups is critical.

- **REFUGEE POPULATIONS:** Are there provisions in the legislation or policies we should be advocating for their safety and the safety of others?

As for our advocacy, there should be no distinction between refugee populations and anybody else. Everyone's at risk, everyone's a potential carrier. Please see Bread's [policy statement](#) to review our positions on immigrant populations.

- **CLIMATE CHANGE:** A \$1 trillion stimulus shouldn't prop up dirty industry but support transformations that can help us in future. Any recommended action or legislation?

The fossil fuel industry should certainly not be bailed out. Its current problems are related more to Saudi Arabia than the pandemic. At some point, the United States may need to set up a

major public sector job creation program, and large numbers of people could be employed in building new climate-friendly infrastructure and repairing old structures.