



June 9, 2022

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The Greater Chicago Food Depository’s Lunch Bus Resumes Meal Distributions at 12 City and Suburban Locations to Ensure Kids Don’t Go Hungry During the Summer Break

Includes new partnership with the Chicago Park District’s Rollin’ Rec Activity Van to keep youth nourished and active

Chicago – As child food insecurity in Chicago and Cook County persists at levels that consistently surpass pre-pandemic levels, the Greater Chicago Food Depository’s Lunch Bus is preparing to distribute free, healthy boxed lunches and snacks to youth again this summer.

During the academic year, many families in high need communities who rely on the free school lunches to provide a nutritious meal for their children lose that important resource when school is not in session. The Food Depository’s Lunch Bus helps to fill that gap during the summer by distributing free, healthy boxed lunches and snacks to youth.

This year, the Lunch Bus will make 12 daily stops (Monday through Friday) to reach youth across the city and suburbs. The stops are divided into three routes - two suburban and one city route – and are located at convenient, well-known community sites such as parks, libraries, and churches. **Distributions will start in the suburbs on June 13** and run through August 12. The Lunch Bus will make stops at Berwyn, Cicero, Justice and Maywood in the west suburbs, and Dolton, Lansing and two Chicago Heights locations in the south suburbs. It will remain on site to distribute meals for 30 minutes. The suburban stops and start times are:

| West Suburban Route (June 13 – August 12) | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------|----------|
| 1 | Berwyn Township | 6600 W. 26th St. | Berwyn | 11:00 AM |
| 2 | Justice Park District | 7747 S. Oak Grove Ave. | Justice | 12:10 PM |
| 3 | Cicero Public Library | 5225 W Cermak Rd. | Cicero | 1:00 PM |
| 4 | Maywood Public Library | 121 S 5th Ave. | Maywood | 2:30 PM |

| South Suburban Route (June 13 – August 12) | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1 | Faith United Methodist Church | 15015 Grant St. | Dolton | 10:45 AM |
| 2 | Jirtle Park | E 25th St. & Union Ave. | Chicago Heights | 11:50 AM |
| 3 | Smith Park | W 14th Pl. & Ashland Ave. | Chicago Heights | 1:00 PM |
| 4 | Lansing Public Library | 2750 Indiana Ave. | Lansing | 2:00 PM |

Meanwhile, **the Lunch Bus’s city route commences June 27** and will run through August 19.

“This year, we are very excited to partner with the Chicago Park District’s Rollin’ Rec Activity Van for our Lunch Bus city route this year,” said Dominique Gardner, manager of Youth Food Programs at the Greater Chicago Food Depository. “The collaboration enables us to reach a sector of youth in the city that we haven’t reached before. Our meals complement the Rollin’ Rec Van’s services nicely and ensures that kids are sufficiently nourished and energized to fully engage in the Rollin’ Rec Van’s fun activities.”

Starting July 5, the Chicago Park District’s Rollin’ Rec Activity Van will offer fun for the whole family at a number of parks throughout the city. The vans drive in, and the fun rolls out with sports, games and fitness activities. Registration is not required. The collaboration with the Lunch Bus will offer youth the opportunity to have fun and eat a nutritious lunch. During the summer of 2019, more than 4,500 children participated in the Rollin’ Rec Van’s activities.

The Lunch Bus and Rollin’ Rec Van will be at the following Chicago locations at these times:

| City of Chicago Route | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | | | | LUNCH BUS arrival (30 mins) | ROLLIN’ REC VAN arrival (1 hour) |
| | | | | Service starts June 27 | Service starts July 5 |
| 1 | Back of the Yards Park | 4922 S. Throop St. | New City | 12:30 PM | 12:00 PM |
| 2 | La Villita Park | 2800 S. Sacramento Ave. | South Lawndale | 1:30 PM | 1:30 PM |
| 3 | Park 500 | 730 S. Springfield Ave. | West Garfield Park | 2:30 PM | 3:00 PM |
| 4 | Magnolia Park | 3224 W. Flournoy St. | East Garfield Park | 3:10 PM | 4:30 PM |

Lunch bus routes are determined following an analysis of a neighborhood’s area median income, child nutrition data and poverty levels, as well as the program’s previous year performance to ensure the Lunch Bus is reaching children with the highest need.

As a federally funded child nutrition program, all youth under the age of 18 are eligible for the Lunch Bus meals. Each child is given two options: a healthy boxed lunch consisting of a salad, sandwich, or wrap, with fruits and vegetables, or a nutritious shelf stable snack such as cheese sticks, crackers, hummus, fruit cups and milk.

Before the pandemic, youth had to be present to receive a meal and were permitted to collect one lunch box each for themselves. They were also required to consume the meal on site, which has long been regarded as a barrier to program participation. Parents, guardians and friends were not allowed to pick up meals on behalf of children.

However, during the pandemic when COVID-19 mitigation guidelines limited social gatherings, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued emergency waivers that allowed for more flexibility. Parents and guardians were authorized to collect the meals from the Lunch Bus on behalf of their children, as well as pick up meals for each child in their household. The requirement that children eat the meal on site was also lifted to avoid congregating.

The current waivers are set to expire June 30, 2022. And even though the Illinois State Board of Education has requested the waivers be renewed, as of June 9 it is not known if the extension will be approved. Regardless, meals will still be served throughout the summer. “The waivers bring a level of program flexibility that enables the Food Depository to dispense more meals and serve more youth, while increasing accessibility for families,” added Gardner. In 2019, the Food Depository’s Lunch Bus program distributed approximately 12,900 meals to youth in Cook County compared to more than 43,000 meals in 2021.

The Lunch Bus is just one of the Food Depository’s Summer Meals programs that gets healthy meals to children during the summer months. Since 2004, the Food Depository has partnered with approximately 200 community organizations, park districts and youth program operators every year to provide nutritious meals at hundreds of summer meal sites across Cook County. In summer 2021, the Food Depository distributed more than 501,000 meals in partnership with summer feeding sites.

Any family with children in need of summer meals can visit summermealsillinois.org or text FOOD or COMIDA to 304-304 to find an open meal site near them.

Latest data from Northwestern University labor economist and Food Depository board member Dr. Diane Schanzenbach estimates that 22% of children in the Chicago Metro Area were living in food insecure households at the end of January/early February 2022. And according to the Food Research and Action Center’s [2020 Summer Nutrition Status Report](#), of every 100 students who receive a free or reduced price school lunch only 12 participate in a free summer meal program.

To learn more about the Rollin’ Rec Activity Van, go to chicagoparkdistrict.com/rollin-rec.

About the Greater Chicago Food Depository

The Greater Chicago Food Depository, Chicago’s food bank, believes a healthy community starts with food. The Food Depository is at the center of a network of more than 700 partner organizations and programs – food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, mobile distributions and other partners – working to bring food, dignity and hope to our neighbors across Chicago and Cook County. The Food Depository addresses the root causes of hunger with job training, advocacy and other innovative solutions. The Food Depository is a proud member of Feeding America – the national network of food banks. Learn more at chicagosfoodbank.org.

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