

[County Name] County Food Stamp Program Memorandum [##-##]

To: All [County Name] Staff

From: [Name], Food Stamp Program [Title]

Date: [Enter Date of Memorandum]

Re: New Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview for ALL Non-Assistance Food Stamp Households

Background

In order to increase participation and streamline accessibility of the Food Stamp Program among underserved populations, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has approved a new four year waiver that allows all California counties to waive the face-to-face interview at initial application and recertification for all non-assistance food stamp (NAFS) households. This waiver applies county-wide and shall not be limited to any individual office or sub-population of applicants.

Implementation of this waiver replaces the previous waiver implemented in [County Name] County on [Date] that required case documentation of a hardship in order to waive the face-to-face interview.

Reference

All County Letter 09-62

Procedure

Effective [Insert Date], the face-to-face interview shall be waived at initial application and recertification for all food stamp households. In lieu of the face-to-face interview, telephone interviews must be conducted for all food stamp households as the default method of completing the interview requirement. There is no need to document whether a hardship exists to justify conducting interviews by phone.

EXCEPTIONS:

1. A household or the household's authorized representative can request a face-to-face interview, which shall be granted upon request.
2. In the unique instance where all other means of acquiring the information necessary to determine eligibility have been exhausted, a face-to-face interview may be conducted. The reason for the face-to-face interview must be noted in the case record.

NOTIFICATION:

All persons applying for or recertifying their food stamp benefits shall be notified of the phone interview policy prior to coming into the county, regional, or satellite office. An announcement of the new policy and process shall be posted on the county website and in the lobby of each county, regional, and satellite office, as well as sites hosting out-stationed eligibility workers; distributed to partner organizations, resource and referral services, and telephone hotlines; and, included in the application packets given to individuals requesting a food stamp application. A cover sheet explaining the phone interview process shall be included in application packets.

SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS:

A phone interview shall be scheduled at the time the application is filed and on a date and time that is mutually convenient for both the interviewer and household. The phone interview shall be scheduled so that the applicant has at least ten (10) days after the interview in which to provide verification before the certification period expires.

RESCHEDULING OR MISSED INTERVIEWS:

If the applicant does not answer at the time of the scheduled interview, the assigned worker shall make three (3) additional calls to the household at 10 minute intervals and be sure to call the alternate numbers provided by the applicant. For example, if the interview appointment is scheduled for 10 a.m. and the assigned worker does not reach the applicant, they will call again at 10:10 a.m., 10:20 a.m., and 10:30 a.m. If the applicant is unreachable, the assigned worker shall send a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) reminding the applicant to reschedule the interview prior to the 30th day after the filing of the initial application. The worker must grant an applicant's request to reschedule their phone interview. The worker shall not deny the household's application prior to the 30th day after the initial application if the applicant misses the first schedule interview.

FINGERPRINTING:

If the application was certified by an out of the office interview, such as a phone interview, benefits can be issued without a finger image. The fingerprint (SFIS) requirement remains in place and can be met the next time applicant is in the county office or by recertification. The applicant shall be reminded to complete the SFIS requirement when they are in the office before recertification, in order to be eligible recertify their benefits by phone. If the applicant does not complete the fingerprinting requirement within that time, they must be recertified by a face-to-face interview. If the initial application and interview is completed in a district office, it is in the best interest of the worker and client to complete the SFIS requirement at that time.

RECERTIFICATION:

The annual recertification of benefits for Food Stamp only participants shall be done by phone.

A face-to-face interview must be conducted at recertification if the household (1) has not met the SFIS requirement; (2) requests a face-to-face interview; or, (3) in the unique instance where all other means of acquiring the information necessary to determine eligibility have been exhausted, a face-to-face interview may be conducted. The reason for the face-to-face interview must be noted in the case record.

VERIFICATION:

The rules regarding mandatory and optional verification information still apply. Federal law permits special procedures to be used for cases certified over the telephone, such as substituting a collateral contact in cases where documentary verification would normally be provided. The worker shall make every effort to ensure applicants are aware and understand the verification documents or actions they need to provide or take to clarify household circumstances. The worker shall make every effort to not require applicants to provide documentary verification unless clearly required or questionable.

CASE RECORD:

The type of interview, phone or face-to-face, must be noted in the case record.