

Consultation on reducing the claim period for the Day Care Foods (Nursery Milk) Scheme in Northern Ireland

18 June 2026

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Background	3
3. Purpose of the Consultation.....	3
4. Proposal.....	3
5. Considerations	4
6. Consultation Questions	4
7. Equality and Rural Impacts.....	5
8. How to Respond	5
9. Next Steps.....	6
10. Confidentiality and Data Protection	6

1. Introduction

The Department of Health is undertaking a public consultation on a proposed reduction to the claim period under the Day Care Foods Scheme in Northern Ireland (sometimes referred to as the Nursery Milk Scheme).

It is important to note that this consultation does not relate to the Day Care Foods Scheme itself but focuses specifically on the timeframe available to Day Care Providers to submit claims for reimbursement.

2. Background

[The Healthy Start Scheme and Day Care Food Scheme Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2006](#) enables children under five years of age to receive, free of charge, 189 ml (one third of a pint) of milk each day they attend approved day care facilities for two hours or more. Babies aged under one may instead receive dried baby milk made up to 189 ml (one third of a pint).

The scheme is administered by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) on behalf of the Department of Health.

Under current legislation, Day Care Providers are required to submit claims for reimbursement within 2 years following the period in which the milk or formula is provided. Whilst the majority of claims are submitted within 6 months, those which take longer have potential to create complications for the administration of the scheme and make it more difficult to plan and forecast expenditure.

3. Purpose of the Consultation

The Department is considering reducing the claim period to 6 months in order to:

- Improve the timeliness of claim submissions
- Strengthen financial management and forecasting
- Reduce administrative backlog and processing delays
- Support more efficient delivery of the scheme

This consultation seeks to understand the potential impact of such a change on Day Care Providers and other stakeholders.

4. Proposal

The Department proposes to reduce the existing claim period (2 years) to a shorter period (6 months).

Under the proposed change:

- Claims must be submitted within the revised timeframe following the end of the claim period
- Guidance and support would be provided to help providers adapt to the revised arrangements

5. Considerations

In developing this proposal, the Department has considered several factors:

- The need for timely and accurate financial reconciliation
- Administrative efficiencies within scheme management
- The operational capacity of Day Care Providers
- The potential impact on smaller providers with limited administrative resources

The Department recognises that any change may require adjustment and is committed to ensuring that implementation is proportionate and manageable.

6. Consultation Questions

The Department invites responses to the following questions:

Q1: Do you work, or have you ever worked, in a nursery setting that is eligible to claim reimbursement for milk/infant formula under The Healthy Start Scheme and Day Care Food Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006?

For those who answer yes to Q1:

Q2: What best describes the type of childcare setting that you work / have worked in?

Q3: Does your organisation currently claim, or have they ever claimed, Government reimbursement for milk/formula provided under the scheme?

For those who answer yes to Q3:

Q4: Please provide your Nursery ID.

Q5: How often does your organisation claim reimbursement for milk/formula purchased under the Day Care Foods Scheme?

Q6: What impact, if any, would reducing the claim period to 6 months have on your organisation or the organisations you represent?

For those who answered No to Q3:

Q7. What are the reasons your organisation does not claim reimbursement for milk or formula under the Day Care Foods (Nursery Milk) Scheme, despite being eligible to do so?

For all respondents

Q8. Do you consider six months a sufficient time period within which to claim reimbursement for milk purchased under the Day Care Foods (Nursery Milk) Scheme?

Q9: If you answered no to question 8, please indicate why and what time period you think would be appropriate.

Q10: Please share any other comments you may have regarding the Nursery Milk Scheme.

7. Equality and Rural Impacts

In line with its statutory obligations, the Department will consider the potential impacts of this proposal on equality groups under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as well as any rural needs implications.

Respondents are encouraged to provide any relevant information or evidence to inform these considerations.

8. How to Respond

Responses can be submitted by any of the following methods:

- Online via the NICS Consultation Portal [Citizen Space](#)
- By e-mailing the completed consultation questionnaire to healthystart@health-ni.gov.uk
- By posting the completed consultation questionnaire to:

Day Care Foods Consultation
Health Improvement Policy Branch
Department of Health
Room D3
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SQ

Responses will not be accepted after **Midnight on Tuesday 13 August 2026**

9. Next Steps

Following the close of the consultation, the Department will:

- Review and analyse all responses received
- Publish a summary of responses
- Consider whether to proceed with the proposed change
- Provide advance notice of any implementation date

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Information you give may be published or shared under access to information laws. Any personal details or identifying information will be handled in line with data protection rules.

Respondents should indicate clearly if they wish any part of their response to remain confidential.

Queries in respect of this consultation should be directed to healthystart@health-ni.gov.uk or to Health Improvement Policy Branch the postal address above.