

Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs

Schools participating in a federal Child Nutrition Program (School Lunch, School Breakfast or After School Snack Program) are required to make accommodations for children who are unable to eat the school meals because of a disability* that restricts their diet. In order to make these dietary modifications, schools must have a written Medical Statement on file that is signed by a licensed physician. The statement must identify:

- The child's disability
- An explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet
- The major life activity affected by the disability
- The food(s) to be omitted from the child's diet
- The food or choice of foods that must be substituted

Schools may, at their discretion, make substitutions for students who have a special dietary need, but do not meet the definition of disability. Examples include food intolerances or allergies that do not have life-threatening reactions, such as a milk intolerance. The decision to accommodate a student's special dietary need can be determined on a case-by-case basis, however, the school should remain consistent with accommodating a special dietary need. The school must have a written Medical Statement signed by a recognized medical authority identifying the following:

- An identification of the medical or other special dietary condition which restricts the child's diet
- The food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet
- The food or choice of foods to be substituted

In Pennsylvania, a recognized medical authority includes a Physician, Physician's Assistant, and Nurse Practitioner.

***Only a physician can declare if a student has a disability.**

Responsibility of Parents

- Notify the school of any food allergy, disability or special dietary need.
- Provide Medical Statement completed by a physician (disability) or recognized medical authority (special dietary need).
- Participate in any meetings or discussions regarding the student's meal plan. Maintain a healthy line of communication with the school.
- Notify the school of any changes relating to the special dietary need (a new Medical Statement is required if the diet changes).

School Food Service Responsibility

- Provide food substitutions for students according to Medical Statement. The school food service staff may not revise or change a diet prescription or medical order.
- Provide training to cafeteria personnel on how to properly accommodate students with special dietary needs. Maintain documentation of this training.
- Communicate with parents, staff, and medical authorities regarding diet modifications.
- Maintain Medical Statement on each student with a special dietary need. Diet orders are not required to be renewed on a yearly basis, however, PDE recommends that you confirm current diet orders on a yearly basis. This can be confirmed by the parent. If there are any changes to the diet, a new Medical Statement is required.

Additional Resources:

USDA's Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/guidance/special_dietary_needs.pdf

National Food Service Management Institute's Meeting Children's Special Food and Nutrition Needs in Child Nutrition Programs:
http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/nfsmi/Information/special_food_and_nutrition_needs/index.html

Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network: <http://www.foodallergy.org/>

Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network handouts on how to read food labels:
<http://www.foodallergy.org/downloads/HTRLsheet.pdf>

School Nutrition Association's allergy information resources website:
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=634>

Additional Contact Information:

Contact the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, with questions regarding accommodating students with special dietary needs in the School Meals Programs at 1-800-331-0129, Extension 62374657.

For questions about developing a 504 plan for a student with special needs, please contact Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education at (717) 783-6913.

For questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of the school nurse in providing services for a student with special needs outside of the School Meals Programs, please contact the local PA School Health Consultant in your area. Contact information is available at <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/SHConsultantList.pdf> or by calling 877-PAHEALTH.

Medical Statement for Students with Special Dietary Needs In Child Nutrition Programs

Student's Name: _____ Age: _____

School Name: _____ Grade Level: _____ Classroom: _____

Please check one box below:

Does the student have a disability that requires the student to have a special diet or feeding equipment/utensils?

Yes

If Yes, describe the disability and the major life activity affected by the disability. The form must be signed by a physician. Return it to the school when completed.

Describe the disability/diagnosis: _____

If the student is NOT disabled, does he/she have a medically certified special dietary need?

Yes

If Yes, the form must be signed by a physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner. Return it to the school when completed.

Diet Prescription: (use back of form if more space is needed)

List Food Allergies/Intolerances (list specific food(s) to be omitted): _____

List Allowable Food Substitutions: _____

Indicate any texture modifications and which foods need to be modified:

Chopped/Cut up: _____

Ground: _____

Pureed: _____

Liquid Modifications: Honey / Nectar / Other (specify)

List special equipment/utensils needed:

Additional comments about the student's eating patterns or dietary modifications:

Physician's or Medical Authority's Signature: _____ Date: _____