

# SCHOOL FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

## Common Questions: School Nutrition Directors

### Is the school required to make accommodations for all students with food allergies?

Any food allergy may be a disability depending on an assessment by a State licensed healthcare professional. A State licensed healthcare professional is defined as an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law. All food allergies, whether life-threatening or not, may be considered a disability. School nutrition programs are required to make reasonable accommodations for food-related disabilities that ensures children with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate in, or benefit from, a program. School nutrition programs are encouraged, but not required to make meal modifications for students with non-disability dietary preferences that are not considered disabilities.

### Why is documentation required for students with food allergies?

Proper documentation is needed to make sure reasonable accommodations are being made to keep students with food allergies safe. A medical statement is required to receive reimbursement for meals that do not follow the required meal pattern.

### What documentation is needed to make meal modifications for a student with food allergies?

A student with food allergies or food-related disability and whose required meal modification does not meet the meal pattern must have a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian. The USDA *Final Rule - Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 DGAs* allows registered dietitians to submit medical statements for meal modifications for participants with disabilities. Registered dietitians are not required to have a State license. The following information must be included in the medical statement.

- A clear description of the student's physical or mental impairment that explains how the

disability restricts the student's diet (i.e., school nutrition staff should know the student's food allergy(s) and what allergic reactions they have)

- an explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability, and
- the food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives, in case a substitution or modified meal is needed.

School nutrition offices are encouraged to make the process of requesting a meal modification as simple and straightforward as possible. For example, they are encouraged to include information about meal modification requests when sending out applications for free and reduced-price school meals, in student handbooks, on the district's website, or in the same place where school lunch menus are posted.

If a meal modification for a child's disability can be made within the program meal pattern, a medical statement is not necessary, and USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) does not require child nutrition departments to obtain a medical statement. However, State agencies and/or school districts may choose to require a medical statement in this situation. Check with your State agency before changing any policies. It is also best practice to document what procedures and processes are done to protect the child.

### To what length must school nutrition operations go to accommodate a child with a food allergy?

If a child's food allergy is considered a disability, a school must make a reasonable accommodation to provide an allergen-free meal to the student and a safe environment in which to consume the meal. The school nutrition staff must work closely with parents and the school community to determine how best to meet the dietary needs of the child.

### If making substitutions for students with food



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## allergies costs extra money, where can I get funding?

A school cannot charge a student with allergies more than it charges other students. Extra expenses can be minimized by choosing an allergen-free menu from the items already being offered. Additional funds could come from the school's general fund, or from resources listed in USDA's *Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Professionals*.



## Can I use a website to check food labels for allergens?

Although labeling information posted on websites can be helpful, they may not be up to date. To make sure a product is safe, read the ingredients label each time you receive it and call the manufacturer if you have questions.

## References

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