



Special Dietary Needs

Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide

OVERVIEW

On July 25, 2017, the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) announced the release of the 2017 edition of *Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs*. This provides guidance on the requirement for school food authorities to ensure equal access to program benefits for children with disabilities, which includes providing special meals to children with a disability that restricts their diet. SP26-2017 *Accommodating Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance and Questions and Answers (Q&As)* provides practical guidance related to accommodating disabilities in the School Meal Programs. The Q&As illustrate certain principles and give general direction on what local educational agencies (LEAs), school food authorities (SFAs), and schools must do to comply with Federal law and ensure children with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in the School Meal Programs.

TERMINOLOGY

Request for Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition – A form completed and signed by a recognized medical authority, used to accommodate dietary needs for conditions that impair major life activities.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS?

Per policy memos SP 59-2016 and SP 27-2017, it is necessary to accommodate dietary needs for conditions that impair major life activities. These include but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working. "Major life activities" also include the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

Students who have situations that meet these definitions may receive special meal accommodations from school meal programs. In order for school food service staff to accommodate these requests and maintain the required documentation, a Request for Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition must be completed for each student requesting special accommodations; food service staff is required to have this documentation on file in order to safely follow the accommodation. If a student has a Request for Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition currently on file, a new form does not need to be completed and submitted. Additionally, the Request for Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition does not need to be renewed on a yearly basis; however, it should be updated to reflect the current medical and/or nutritional needs of the participant.

The Idaho Child Nutrition Program has updated the Request for Special Meal Accommodation Due to Medical Condition form to reflect the regulations. Be sure to use the new form as you accept medical statements for dietary requests.

There are two forms located in MyIdahoCNP to meet this need, one includes a request for meal preferences on the back and one does not have this option. It is up to your district to decide if you will accommodate meal preferences *within the meal pattern*, such as those for religious beliefs or dietary preferences.

Keep in mind that meal accommodations for medical conditions may not be addressed with Offer Versus Serve. Students with a Request for Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition form on file must be given the option to take all food components. Please see the *USDA Guide for Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs* resource.

Details

- School food service must follow instructions that have been prescribed by the authorized medical authority.
- Accommodating special dietary needs apply regardless of free, reduced, or paid meal status.
- Special Meal Accommodation due to Medical Condition meals must be served at no additional cost to the student.
- FNS does not require SFAs to obtain written documentation from a State licensed healthcare professional rescinding the original medical order prior to ending a meal modification. However, FNS recommends that SFAs maintain documentation when ending a meal modification. For example, an SFA could ask the child's parent or guardian to sign a statement indicating their child no longer needs a meal modification before ending the modification. Additional cost for food accommodations for a disability is an allowable food service program cost.
- Children with disabilities must be allowed to participate with other children to the maximum extent appropriate. The school must not segregate children with disabilities on the basis of convenience to the school or to other children.
- In rare instances, it may be to a child's benefit to be served separately. For instance, a child with severe motor disabilities may be able to receive individualized attention in handling eating utensils if a special education specialist is able to work with them outside the cafeteria. In all cases, the decision to feed a child with disabilities separately must always be based on what is appropriate to meet the needs of the child.
- Medical information must be kept confidential. Only share information with staff that needs to know to provide for the health, safety, and well-being of the student.

Best Practices for Accommodating Special Dietary Needs

- Provide clear guidelines for food service staff
- Ensure students are treated consistently
- Document compliance with Federal and State requirements

- Educate families regarding school policies and procedures
- Monitor to ensure meal modifications follow accommodations per the Request for Special Meal Accommodation Due to Medical Condition on file
- Facilitate communication with the appropriate administrative and/or support staff (504 coordinator, school nurse)

Covering Modified Meal Costs

Children with disabilities can often be accommodated with little extra expense or involvement, and in many cases, the SFA is able to absorb any additional expenses involved in making the modification. When necessary, however, SFAs may use funds from the nonprofit school food service account to cover the additional costs. When the nonprofit school food service account is not a viable option, the general fund or special education funds (if specified in the child's IEP) may be used to offset the cost.

Please see the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) *Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs*, available in the Additional Resources section of this guide for more information on providing meals to children with disabilities.

WHY ARE SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS IMPORTANT?

Special dietary needs are important to ensure that all students in schools participating in Federal school meal programs may be served.

RESOURCES

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides and helpful links to relevant subject matter.

For Questions Contact

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