

# FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

## Common Questions: Child Nutrition Directors

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

A life-threatening allergy is considered a disability; and school nutrition programs are required to make accommodations. Allergies that are not life-threatening are considered special dietary needs, but not disabilities. School nutrition programs are encouraged, but not required, to make food substitutions for students with special dietary needs that are not a disability. However, if the licensed physician determines that a child's food allergies may result in severe, life-threatening (anaphylactic) reactions, the child's condition would meet the definition of "disability," and the substitutions prescribed by the licensed physician must be made.

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

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

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

Students with food allergies must have a medical statement from a licensed physician that includes the following: the child's disability, in this situation a life threatening food allergy; an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet; the major life activity affected by the disability; the food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet; and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted.

### To what length must school nutrition operations go to accommodate a child with a potentially life-threatening allergy?

A life-threatening allergy is considered a disability. A school must provide an allergy-safe meal to the student and a safe environment in which to consume the meal.

### If making substitutions for students with food 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-safe 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 Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Staff*.

### 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 purchase it and call the manufacturer if you have questions.



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