
Subject: **STUDENTS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA**

PURPOSE

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide suggestions to school administrators on safely serving students with food allergies in the school cafeteria.

GUIDELINES

Responsibility

School administrators must inform the food service manager/satellite assistant of any student that has a food allergy, the severity of that food allergy, symptoms of an allergic reaction and how that child should be treated for an allergic reaction. If a parent informs the food service manager/satellite assistant that their child has food allergies, the food service manager/satellite assistant must make sure that the parent informs the school administrator first to ensure all necessary documentation is completed. The school administration is responsible for the collection and processing of the applicable district required documentation regarding emergency orders and authorization for rescue medication depending on the severity of a potential food reaction.

If a student with a documented food allergy, per school administration, will be eating meals from the school cafeteria, the student must have a Medical Statement for Meal Modifications form [FM-5425](#) completed and signed by a state licensed medical authority. The Medical Statement form must be kept on file in the food service manager's office and in the school administration office.

Information

A food allergy occurs when the immune system identifies a food protein as dangerous and creates antibodies against it by releasing substances such as histamine and tryptase to protect the body. Food allergy symptoms range from mild (e.g., itchy mouth, an itchy tongue, or hives) to life threatening (e.g., anaphylactic shock, drop in blood pressure or loss of consciousness) and appear from within a few minutes to two hours after ingestion or contact with the allergic food.

The most severe food allergy reaction is called anaphylaxis. Difficulty breathing, throat constriction, decreased blood pressure and unconsciousness may occur almost simultaneously and may cause death. Anaphylaxis progresses quickly, and treatment usually includes an injection of epinephrine.

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There are eight major food allergens, including milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (such as walnuts and almonds), soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. These eight foods are the most common food allergens and cause more than 90 percent of all food allergic reactions. A student with a food allergy can sometimes have an allergic reaction without ingesting the food. For example, skin contact with food particles on a table might cause an allergic reaction.

Suggestions for School Administration for Managing Food Allergic Children

While you might be tempted to ban allergenic foods from your school, this may not be effective or practical. Bans on food allergens may be very difficult to enforce and may not render an allergic child's environment absolutely safe. Bans may create a false sense of security for the allergic child and school staff, which can potentially lead to serious injury or death. Actions to support a safe environment for students with allergies:

- A. Requiring awareness by school nurses, staff, teachers and administration, students and parents.
- B. Establishing lunch tables that are free of allergenic foods. Allergic students can still enjoy sitting with their friends who also have "safe" (allergen free) lunches.
- C. Designating a person to be responsible for ensuring that lunch tables and surrounding areas are thoroughly cleaned before and after lunch. Use a cleaning cloth for the allergy-free tables to avoid cross contact.
- D. Prohibiting lunch swapping and food sharing.
- E. Keen awareness by teachers and staff to eliminate the food allergen in foods brought from home, celebrations with food at school, or in school food sales.
- F. Encouraging students and staff to wash their hands with soap and water before and after eating/handling food.

Meal Service in the School Cafeteria for a Child with Food Allergies

Eating in the school cafeteria is often stressful for students with food allergies. Hidden ingredients and cross contact between foods are often cause for concern. Serving meals to a child with food allergies can be just as stressful to the cafeteria staff. The following are some guidelines for Food Service Managers to manage meal service to a child with food allergies:

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROCEDURES

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

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- A. Ensure school administration is informed and has completed all necessary documents for a child with a food allergy in the school.
- B. Inform your food service supervisor of the documented student with a food allergy at your school.
- C. Ensure that a state licensed medical authority for the student has completed the [FM-5425 Medical Statement for Meal Modifications](#) form for you to know what foods need to be avoided and what substitute foods can be used.
- D. Develop a system for checking ingredient labels carefully for every food item to be served to the student with the allergy.
- E. Designate an area in the kitchen where allergy-free meals can be prepared. This area should be a “safe zone” and kept free of ingredients allergic students should avoid.
- F. Use separate utensils when preparing allergy-free foods.
- F. The food service manager/satellite assistant must enter a note in the student’s account to notify the cashier(s) of the student’s meal substitution and/or restrictions:
 - Query student account in “Student”
 - Click on “Edit”
 - Click on “Limits” tab
 - In “POS Message”, type reason (e.g., *cannot have milk, eggs/special juice etc.*)
 - Check the box that reads “is allergic message”
 - Click “Update”

Since peanuts or other allergens may come into contact with food products during the production or manufacturing process, the School District cannot guarantee that food products on the District menu or items sold a la carte do not contain trace amounts of peanuts or other allergens.

Principals must contact Comprehensive Student Health Services at (305) 995-4111 for guidance on medication administration during the school day. School administration should ensure that the food service staff is informed of, and familiar with, emergency medical treatment for a child having an allergic reaction.

**FOOD AND NUTRITION
PROCEDURES**
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For Action By: Principals, Food Service Managers and Satellite Assistants

Refer Questions to: Department of Food and Nutrition

*Revised: November 2007, July 2010, August 2018, August 2022, July 2024, October 2024,
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