

## Meals for Children/Infants with Disabilities

Sponsors are **required** to provide meal component substitutions to a disabled child/infant when supported by a medical statement signed by a licensed physician. The determination of whether or not a child/infant has a disability that restricts his or her diet is to be made on an individual basis by a licensed physician. The physician's medical statement of the child's/infant's disability must be based on the regulatory criteria for "disabled child/infant" and contain a finding that the disability restricts the child's/infant's diet.

The medical statement must identify:

- The child's/infant's disability and an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's/infant's diet;
- The major life activity or activities affected by the disability;
- The food or foods to be omitted from the child's/infant's diet;
- The food or choice of foods to be used as substitutions; and
- Any other restrictions and/or requirements specific to the child's/infant's disability (e.g., caloric modifications or the substitution of a liquid nutritive formula).

**NOTE:** If the child's/infant's disability requires only textural modification(s) to the regular program meal or if a substitution can be made using another creditable food item within the same meal component group, as opposed to a meal pattern substitution, then the medical statement is recommended, but not required. **Examples:** 1) a child cannot swallow whole raw or cooked carrots, but can swallow pureed carrots; 2) a child is allergic to peanuts so the center substitutes ham and cheese for that child on the day the center provides peanut butter sandwiches for the other children.

Children/infants with food allergies or intolerances, or obese children/infants do not necessarily meet the regulatory criteria for "disabled child/infant".

However, if the physician's assessment finds that the food allergy may result in severe, life-threatening reactions (anaphylactic reactions) or the obesity is severe enough to substantially limit a major life activity, then the child/infant meets the definition of "disabled child/infant", and you must make the substitutions prescribed by the licensed physician and supported by the physician's medical statement.

Sites must:

- Keep on file a copy of the licensed physician's medical statement;
- Provide the meal substitutions at no additional cost to the child's/infant's parent (or guardian); and
- Document meal substitutions.

We strongly encourages sites to work closely with the parent (or guardian) for the health, well-being and education of children/infants with disabilities to ensure that reasonable accommodations are made to allow children/infants with disabilities to participate in the meal service. This is particularly important when accommodating children/infants whose disability(ies) requires significant modifications or personal assistance.

The reimbursement rate for meals served to children/infants with disabilities is the same standard rate as all other program meals; however, the added cost of providing meal substitutions is an allowable program cost in your food budget.