

Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs

Providers sometimes have questions concerning food and milk accommodations for the children in their care. It can be a complex task for a provider to make sure food and milk substitutions are handled and documented correctly according to CACFP requirements. The Illinois State Board of Education strongly encourages providers to work closely with parents/guardians for these types of requests.

What Documentation is Required?

- For substitution requests due to a disability (i.e. a life-threatening reaction when exposed to the food and/or beverage) or other medical reason, such as a food intolerance or allergies, the *Physician's Statement for Food Substitutions* (form available on ICCB's website under the Resources Tab, then see Forms) is required and should be kept on file at the provider's home and sent to the Illinois Child Care Bureau office (your food program sponsor). The *Physician's Statement* must include:
 - The child's disability, explanation as to how the disability restricts the child's diet, and the major life activity affected by a disability (or, in cases of non-disability, the medical problem that restricts the child's diet);
 - Foods/beverages to be omitted;
 - Foods/beverages to be substituted;
 - Signature and date of the medical authority completing the form: medical authorities include licensed physicians, chiropractic physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners.
- If the request is just for a fluid milk substitution (such as soy milk or almond milk), a signed statement from a medical authority, parent or guardian which includes the medical or other special dietary reason for the need for substitution may be accepted and kept on file. Any reasonable request could be accepted (e.g. milk allergy, vegan diet, and religious, cultural or ethical reasons).
- In cases where a parent or guardian requests a food substitution for non-medical reasons (including diets that are vegetarian, vegan, etc.; religious reasons; and personal preference), institutions should keep the parent/guardian request on file.

All substitutions should be noted on CACFP menus.

What Substitutions are Reimbursable?

For a child with a disability:

The provider must provide the substitutions to the regular meal and/or snack, including milk, for any child with disabilities, according to the specifications listed on the *Physician's Statement*. In all cases, meals may be claimed, even when the CACFP Meal Pattern cannot be met based on the food or beverage to be omitted or substituted.

For a child without a disability: The provider should follow the instructions on a *Physician's Statement* for requests due to medical reasons, but is not required to provide the substituted components. If the parent/guardian provides the component (s), the provider would still need to provide at least one component to claim the meal.

In cases of non-medical substitution requests made by a parent/guardian, providers are encouraged to work with parent/guardian and children to provide foods that can be eaten. When there is no medical reason, the provider cannot claim the meal for reimbursement if it has not provided all of the CACFP Meal Pattern components.

Other than milk substitutions, most substitution requests for a child without a disability can be accommodated and still meet CACFP Meal Pattern requirements. If the CACFP Meal Pattern requirements cannot be met due to a food substitution request for a child without a disability, please contact the Illinois Child Care Bureau office for guidance. (The *Food Substitution Chart* is available on ICCB's website under Resources, Nutrition Information.)

For milk substitution requests for a child without a disability, refer to the chart below. If a milk substitute meets these requirements, keep a copy of the nutrition information on file. If the *Nutrition Facts Label* on the products does not list all the required nutrients listed below, the provider must request documentation from the product manufacturer to confirm the presence of all required nutrients at the proper level. (If the milk substitute does not meet these nutrient requirements, or it cannot be verified that the product contains the required nutrients, meals requiring a milk component cannot be claimed.)

Nutrient	Per Cup
Calcium	276 mg
Protein	8 g
Vitamin A	500 IU
Vitamin D	100 IU
Magnesium	24 mg
Phosphorus	222 mg
Potassium	349 mg
Riboflavin	0.44 mg
Vitamin B-12	1.1 mcg