



## Peoria Unified School District

### Food & Nutrition Department

#### Special Diet Accommodations FAQ Sheet

##### Nutrition Overview

The Peoria Unified School District Food & Nutrition Department strives to offer healthy, well-balanced meals that are required to meet the strict nutritional guidelines and standards for the National School Breakfast and Lunch programs governed by the USDA. Students must select at least 3 components from the 5 offered components to comprise a reimbursable lunch; meat/protein, grain, milk, fruit, and vegetable. At breakfast, students must select 3 out of the 4 components. At both breakfast and lunch, one of the components selected by students must be either a fruit or a vegetable.

##### 1. Who is eligible to receive a special diet accommodation?

The Peoria Unified School District (PUSD) Food & Nutrition Department is dedicated to meeting the nutritional needs of its students, including students with documented medical disabilities. USDA regulations require that substitutions or modifications be made in school meals for children whose disabilities restrict their diets when that need is certified by a licensed physician. Under section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* a “person with a disability” means any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.” The term “physical or mental impairment” includes many conditions including but not limited to: Cancer, Cerebral Palsy, Diabetes, Food Anaphylaxis (severe food allergy), Heart Disease, and Phenylketonuria (PKU). The licensed physician who completes the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form needs to indicate if a child’s medical condition is considered a disability.

The PUSD Food & Nutrition Department may make food substitutions, at their discretion, for individual children who do not have a disability, but who are medically certified as having a special medical or dietary need. The PUSD Food & Nutrition Department will try to accommodate any reasonable request for students without a disability. However, schools are not required to serve special meals to all children with diet restrictions (i.e. most food allergies/intolerances such as wheat, citrus, egg, corn, etc.). Such determinations regarding dietary modifications will be made on a case-by-case basis by the PUSD Food & Nutrition Registered Dietitians.

A “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form is only needed when a menu needs to be modified or substituted and the student is planning on eating school meals. Forms are not necessary for peanut allergy or lactose intolerance if no menu changes are needed and a reimbursable meal can be created. A form does not need to be completed if the student is not planning on eating school meals, but there is a food allergy concern.

Families wanting to manage diabetes, food allergies, etc., without submitting a “Medical Statement” Form, may view information regarding nutrition, carbohydrate content, and major food allergies by viewing the carbohydrate count list and allergen list on the Food & Nutrition section of the district website. However, substitutions and/or modifications cannot be made to the menu if a special diet form is on not file at the Food & Nutrition Office.

**2. The doctor states that my child is allergic to something but he/she eats it at home. Do I have to get the form completed?**

It is your choice whether or not to have the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form completed. However, once this form is approved with the district dietitian, we must follow the licensed physician’s orders to the full extent until the physician indicates otherwise.

**3. Can I complete the form without having a licensed physician complete and sign the form?**

No. In order for meal substitutions or modifications to be made, there must be a medical reason documented by a licensed physician. There are 2 sections on the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form that must be completed. Part I is to be completed by the parent or guardian. Part II is to be completed and signed by a licensed physician (M.D. or D.O.) only. Any forms not completed and signed by a licensed physician will not be processed and will be returned to the parent or guardian.

**4. Where can I find the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form?**

A current “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form is available on the district website under the Families Tab → Breakfast & Lunch → Special Dietary Needs Form. Parents/legal guardians can also obtain a copy from the cafeteria manager at your child’s school.

**5. Where do I submit the completed “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form?**

Submit this form to the Food & Nutrition Department by:

- Mail: PUSD Food & Nutrition Department, 10721 North 95<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Peoria, AZ 85345
- Fax: 623-487-5190
- Email: mbrault@peoriaud.k12.az.us

Please do not submit this form to the school nurse or the district office, as doing so will delay the processing of your request.

**6. How often do I need to have this form completed?**

It is not necessary to provide a new form every school year if there are no dietary updates or changes. It is necessary to provide a new form if the licensed physician marks the “This diet order is Temporary” box on the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form.

**7. How will I know that Peoria Unified School District Food & Nutrition will make the requested accommodation?**

The district dietitian will contact you with the final decision before the student can begin receiving modified meals.

**8. How long does it take for a special diet to get started?**

Once the PUSD Food & Nutrition Department has a completed “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form on file, it can take 10-15 business days for a diet to become available at the child’s school site. This gives the Food & Nutrition Department Registered Dietitians time to modify menus that meet the child’s needs, ensure that the appropriate foods are available, and instruct kitchen managers & staff in regards to each special diet. Parents are encouraged to review with their child appropriate food choices on the approved special diet menu. Furthermore, once appropriate menu/food choices have been determined, the district registered dietitian will place an ‘alert’ on the student’s meal account and the appropriate menu will be followed.

**9. How will I know what is on my child’s menu?**

Menus are created in the Food & Nutrition Department Office and are shared with the kitchen manager at your child’s school site. The kitchen manager then works with each parent to determine how often the menu items will be reviewed (some parents review the menu weekly with the kitchen manager while others might review it one month at a time). It is important that you provide a phone number and a working email address to facilitate communication with the kitchen manager and the Food & Nutrition Department Office.

**10. Will the district dietitian determine how much of a nutrient my child should have (i.e. carbohydrates, sodium, fat, etc.)?**

No. The licensed physician completing the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form must include the specific diet information that your child needs to follow for school meals.

**11. What steps do I need to take if a change is needed to my child’s current special diet accommodation request?**

A new “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form is required to make any changes to a student’s current diet order. Diets can be cancelled by parents in writing, which could include an email to the district dietitian. Any modifications to the diet order must come from a licensed physician. Once a special diet order is cancelled by a parent, a new “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form, completed and signed by a licensed physician, will be required before the diet can be reinstated.

**12. How do I advise the cafeteria when my child plans to bring his/her lunch or is not going to be at school?**

Special diets often come with added time, effort, and costs to the district. It is important for parents to communicate with the kitchen manager. Parents can call and/or email the kitchen manager directly prior to breakfast and lunch meal service. Calling in an absence to the school front office is not sufficient as the office does not advise the kitchen of absences.

**13. What types of milk substitutions are provided for students?**

We can accommodate medical disabilities that require the avoidance of dairy; however, we do not provide milk substitutes. Students are not required to take milk as part of their meal. Therefore, those students who need to avoid dairy can simply decline the milk portion of their meal while still choosing three items from the fruit, vegetable, grain, and meat/meat alternate groups. Students have access to water (drinking fountain or cup) every day in the cafeteria to drink with their meals. Water bottles will not be an available substitute for milk. According to USDA regulations, juice is not a nutritionally equivalent beverage for milk and therefore cannot be provided as a substituted in a meal.

**14. Can I bring special diet food items to school and store them in the school cafeteria?**

We cannot store outside food in the kitchen. There are many factors that affect this including food storage space, food safety, and cross-contamination issues.

**15. Are substitutions for religious or personal preferences (i.e. vegetarian/vegan) offered?**

No. It must be a medically necessary reason. We do offer multiple choices daily, with at least one vegetarian option, to allow students with religious and other personal preferences opportunities to eat with us, but we do not monitor his/her choices.

**16. Are any Peoria Unified School District schools peanut or nut free?**

No. While it is not possible to guarantee a “peanut-free” or “nut-free” school, designating areas in the cafeteria “peanut safe” or “nut safe” is reasonable and appropriate. Please keep in mind there are no restrictions on the products other students can bring in their lunches from home and Peoria Unified School District is not responsible for ensuring lunches brought from home are peanut free.

We do offer peanut butter and jelly sandwiches at some sites. Select elementary schools have chosen not to serve those sandwiches in their kitchens to decrease the risk of anaphylactic reactions in affected students. SunButter and jelly sandwiches are served as a substitute. Each school site [Admin, Nurse, and Kitchen Manager] will determine annually whether they will serve peanut butter in the cafeteria. These forms will be on file at the Food & Nutrition office. Please be aware that this does not guarantee an allergen-free or nut-free school.

**PLEASE NOTE:** PUSD does not currently have a policy regarding allergens in the school or lunch room, nor can we guarantee an allergen-free kitchen. If your child has a severe allergy, it is important to communicate with his/her school (Kitchen Manager, Nurse, and appropriate school staff).

For questions about the “Medical Statement for Special Dietary Accommodations” Form or special diets in general, please contact Melissa Brault, MS, RD at [mbrault@peoriaud.k12.az.us](mailto:mbrault@peoriaud.k12.az.us) or 623-487-5184.