

Allergen and Special Diet Briefing Document

The Department for Education states that schools should make reasonable adjustments for pupils with dietary requirements. It is the responsibility of the school and/or caterer to decide if provision of a special diet meal is feasible and reasonable efforts should be made to cater for all pupils needs.

Caterlink's top priority will always be the safety of the pupils that we cater for, and whilst we strive to cater for every individual, we use the information provided by the parents and schools to assess if a special diet menu can be provided safely.

What is a special diet/ special diet menu?

- A special diet is identified as one where the standard provision requires amendments to be made to ensure that it is safe for a customer, due to a specially diagnosed requirement such as a food allergy or intolerance.
- We do not consider children's preferences as special diets, as we believe that children should be encouraged to try new foods whilst tastebuds are changing and developing.
- Lifestyle and religious choices will not be considered as special diets. In the circumstance that no suitable food is offered as part of the daily provision, please speak to your Caterlink unit manager
- Our secondary schools and higher education settings offer much more choice for students to select from. Allergen information can be given to enable children to make safe, informed choices. Pupils should speak to the catering team for information on suitable dishes.

Additional Information

- a. **Complex or Airborne Allergies:** Schools should undertake a separate risk assessment to evaluate the safety of a pupil with an airborne allergy.
- b. **Severe Allergies:** Schools should discuss any requests for catering for severe allergies with Caterlink and should be aware that removing allergens or ingredients from the full menu provision may be unrealistic and have an impact on the variety of dishes available for the whole school. If a school wishes to remove an allergen or ingredient from the school menu then this must be discussed with the Caterlink Operations Manager to make an informed decision.
- c. **Nut Allergies:** Whilst Caterlink do not knowingly use nuts within their primary school products or recipes, a nut-free environment can never be guaranteed. All Caterlink kitchen staff are trained on safe management of the 14 EU allergens. For through schools or secondary schools that provide food for primary school students, communication would need to be had with the school to make them aware that there may be products stating 'may contain nuts'.
- d. **Re-introduction of allergens to a pupil's diet:** Allergens should only be re-introduced onto a pupil's menu by Caterlink once an allergy has been confirmed to have ceased in writing from the parent or by updated medical evidence. We cannot be responsible for the gradual re-introduction of ingredients (such as re-introduction of milk using the 'milk ladder', or the provision of foods in moderations or specific forms e.g., 'cooked egg only') to a pupil's diet.
- e. **May contain:** Caterlink primary schools treat all 'may contain' allergen information as though the food contains that ingredient.
- f. **Cross Contamination:** Caterlink kitchens contain many foods which are common allergens for children, such as gluten. Whilst staff are trained to manage cross contamination safely, if parents or schools have any concerns the operator can discuss with the nutrition team.

Special Diet Process – Flow Chart

Schools should provide Caterlink with the information required on the child's special diet request, plus acceptable medical evidence. Caterlink have an *Allergy and Intolerance form* that can be used, or schools can use their own form to gather information. Acceptable medical evidence should be documentation from a professional medical source i.e., a medical doctor, registered dietitian, nurse, or other qualified NHS medical professional.

Caterlink will determine if the special diet is safe to accommodate based on the medical evidence, and the **LACA Special Diet Risk Analysis Process**. Caterlink have a team of nutritionists whose job it is to support with managing allergens and special diets safely, and who will be involved as and where needed. Whilst awaiting a special diet risk assessment decision, the pupil may be offered a safe meal, such as jacket potato with beans, vegetables, and fresh fruit.

If the special diet request is found to be medium or low risk, then it is determined safe to provide a menu. It will be the school's responsibility to ensure the correct meal is issued to any child requiring a special meal, we will work with the school on which identification process is used.

If the request comes out as 'high risk', Caterlink will communicate this to the school. This means that the diet is too high risk to be able to provide safe food. The school should let the parent know and signpost to alternative support.

Caterlink state a maximum of a four-week turnaround from confirming a menu can be made to sending the menu out – this allows a robust process in which the special diet menus are both created and double checked. If a special diet menu is requested less than 4 weeks before the end of a menu cycle, the special diet menu will be created for the following menu cycle.

Caterlink will create a special diet menu based on the individual child's requirements and once ready, send it on to the school and/or the kitchen team. A special diet menu will contain at least one hot meal choice per day. We would not offer more than one meal choice where there were not already suitable extra options on the menu as this would promote food waste and increase the pressure on the kitchen.

Should the pupil's allergy/intolerance change, this medical note should be resubmitted to the school with the most recent information. In the instance that a pupil no longer requires special diet support, parents are also required to notify the school in writing. In both instances the school should let Caterlink know as soon as possible.

Any queries should be directed to the Caterlink operations manager in the first instance.