

11 June 2018

Special diets in early childhood education and school – notification for parents

In the South Karelia district, a *Notification of a special diet* form is in use, which complies with the national allergy programme. Parents should fill in the *Notification of a special diet* form and submit it to the food services (preferably online). The form should be updated **at least once a year** and whenever any changes are made to the diet.

In early childhood education and school, a child is provided with a special diet required for treating a medical condition. A medical certificate is required for foods that can cause a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) and for coeliac disease. For wheat and milk allergies, a medical certificate is required the first time the notification is submitted.

Responsibilities of different operators

Parents

- Fill in or update the *Notification of a special diet* form at least once a year, or whenever any changes are made to the diet.
- Take care of the desensitisation to food allergens and the adjustment of the special diet accordingly.
- Make sure that the child gets a balanced age-appropriate diet despite the special

Doctor

- Writes a certificate on life-threatening food allergies and coeliac disease.
- Refers the child to a nutritional therapist, if necessary.

Early childhood education / school staff

- The family daycare provider or the person responsible for food services at a daycare centre makes sure that the child is provided with special diet meals during daycare.
- At school, the child is given instructions as to where he or she gets the special diet meals.
- The teacher must be aware of the student's special diet.

The nutritional therapist

- Children/adolescents should be referred to the nutritional therapist when they have many food restrictions, or when nutritionally essential foods, such as grains or dairy, have been eliminated from the child's diet, or when an allergic child's growth slows down (weight/height).
- The nutritional therapist assesses the nutritional balance of the child's diet and gives guidance to parents.
- A referral from a doctor or a public health nurse is required for the nutritional therapist.

Public health nurse

- Monitors the child's/adolescent's growth and development in age-related examinations.
- If necessary, refers the child to a doctor or nutritional therapist.
Reminds the parents of food experiments and of updating the *Notification of a special diet* form.

Food services

- A chef or a diet chef prepares the special diet meals.
- If necessary, a food service representative participates in the negotiations related to the child's/adolescent's diet and meal arrangements.

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Special diets

Food allergies

Food allergies cannot be prevented in advance by avoiding specific foods.

Mild allergy symptoms are common and usually disappear on their own. Mild allergies can be managed by self-care and monitoring. It is also important to taste small amounts of the food regularly to ensure exposure to the food. If a child suffers from mild symptoms, this should be taken into account by pushing the food in question to the side at meal times. **In such cases the child does not need a special diet or a medical certificate.** Usually uncooked vegetables that cause mild symptoms do not cause any symptoms when cooked. Allergies to additives and spices are extremely rare, and mildly spiced food is suitable for most allergic students.

A severe food allergy causes life-threatening and significant symptoms (such as diarrhoea, vomiting, worsening of asthma), and a special diet is needed. The most common causes of severe allergic reactions are milk, eggs, wheat, fish and nuts. Nutritionally essential foods are replaced with other foods suitable for the child. The diet is based on a diagnosis carried out by a doctor and on a medical certificate. The early childhood education unit or school must be aware of whether the student uses an epinephrine auto-injector and how he or she should be treated in case of accidental ingestion of a food that should be avoided.

Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is a life-long medical condition, which can be managed by following a very strict gluten-free diet. Coeliac disease must always be diagnosed by a doctor. Foods to be avoided in a gluten-free diet are wheat, barley and rye, and these are replaced with gluten-free grains.

Diabetes

A child or adolescent diagnosed with diabetes can eat a normal diet. At school, diabetics are offered additional snacks, and for this reason, a notification of diabetes is needed. Early childhood education and school staff should be aware of the child's or adolescent's diabetes and know what to do in an emergency. The children's hospital is involved with organising the affairs of a diabetic child who is starting school or early childhood education and arranges a meeting with staff from health care and early childhood education / school and the child's family.

Other diets

A lactose-free diet is available on personal notification. A low-lactose diet is not available.

A vegetarian diet is available on personal notification. In early childhood education, a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet is available for those following a vegetarian diet. In comprehensive school and upper secondary school, a vegan diet is also available.

Read more

The Finnish National Allergy Programme: allergiaterveys.fi

Current Care Guidelines: Food allergy (children) / for the patient (www.kaypahoito.fi).

Guide on children's food allergies (www.allergia.fi).