

North Carolina Division of Aging  
 Nutrition Services  
 Effective date – July 1, 2003

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**FOOD PREPARATION AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS**

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**VI. Food Preparation and Safety Requirements**

**Summary of federal and state requirements**

- **Federal, State, and Local Requirements**
  - Federal rules require that nutrition programs comply with all state and local requirements for the safe and sanitary handling of food, equipment, and supplies. Services must meet state and local licensing, health, and safety requirements.
  - Permit – North Carolina nutrition providers must maintain a permit from the Division of Environmental Health, N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and must comply with the food safety and sanitation practices issued in the "Rules Governing the Sanitation of Restaurants and Other Foodhandling Establishments" (15A NCAC 18A .2600).
  - Grade A Sanitation Rating – Nutrition providers and food preparation sub-contractors must follow the sanitation rules in 15A NCAC 18A .2600 to maintain a Grade A (or at least 90%) sanitation rating. If the grade falls below "A" or 90%, the AAA must be notified and must receive a copy of the Environmental Health inspection report. Corrective action must be undertaken and a request for reinspection for purposes of raising the grade must be made within 7 days of the lower grade. When the local Environmental Health Specialist reinspects the facility, the AAA must receive a copy of the reinspection report. The facility where meals are prepared or served may continue to provide meals for the nutrition program with a sanitation rating of less than "A" or 90% at the discretion of the AAA.
- **Food Safety**
  - All staff working in the preparation of food must be under the supervision of a person who shall insure the application of hygienic techniques and practices in food handling, preparation, and service. This supervisory person shall consult with the nutrition service provider's dietitian for advice and consultation as necessary.
  - Nutrition providers must educate participants and all staff annually regarding the sources and prevention of foodborne illness.
  - All food must be packaged and transported in a manner to protect against potential contamination, including dust, insects, rodents, unclean equipment and utensils, and unnecessary handling.
  - Packaging and transport equipment must maintain temperatures. All documentation of food temperatures must be kept on file for audit.

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- The area where meals are handled or served must be kept clean and in good repair.
- Summary of time and temperature requirements:
  - Food temperatures must meet the requirements of "Rules Governing the Sanitation of Restaurants and Other Foodhandling Establishments" (15A NCAC 18A .2600). Basically all potentially hazardous food must be held at 140°F or above or 45°F or below except during necessary periods of preparation and serving.
  - The sanitation rules found at (15A NCAC 18A .2600) allow time rather than temperature requirements under certain procedures approved by the local Environmental Health Specialist.
  - Food preparation caterers must document each food item delivered and record the end of food preparation time on meal delivery tickets (signed by the food production manager).
  - Food not prepared on-site must be received at the drop-off location by a nutrition program employee or trained volunteer.
  - The nutrition program employee or trained volunteer must document meal arrival time on the caterer's delivery ticket (signed by the person receiving the food). If warming equipment or refrigeration equipment is used to hold food prior to serving, then temperatures also must be taken and recorded at the time of food delivery.
  - Congregate Nutrition Program - Food temperatures must be taken just prior to serving congregate meals, and the time of temperature documentation must be noted. Food temperatures must be recorded by the name of each specific food item, except bread products, cake, fresh fruit, and fruit cobblers.
  - Home Delivered Meals Program - regardless of whether food for home delivered meals is received in bulk for packaging at a nutrition site or arrives pre-plated from the caterer, temperatures of each specific food item (except bread products, cake, fresh fruit, and fruit cobblers) must be recorded at least one time per month on each route.
- Food Preparation
  - Food prepared, frozen, or canned in the home cannot be served at the site.
  - Food from unlabeled, rusty, leaking, or broken containers or cans with side dents, rim dents, or swells cannot be used.
  - All meat and poultry, fresh or frozen, must bear inspection stamps on the box or package indicating inspection by USDA, the N.C. Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or other agencies having regulatory authority.

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- **All foods used in the meals must be from sources approved by federal or state agencies (USDA, FDA, the NC Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or other agencies having regulatory authority). All foods used in meals must be in compliance with applicable state and local laws, ordinances, and regulations. They must be clean, wholesome, free from spoilage, free from adulteration and mislabeling, and safe for human consumption.**
- **Fresh raw fish must bear the PUF<sub>I</sub> (Packed Under Federal Inspection) Shield.**
- **Prior to use, all fruits and vegetables must be washed to remove dirt or insecticide residues. Fresh fruits and vegetables free from disease and infestation may be donated and incorporated into the menu only when they can be used to serve all participants.**
- **Whether food is prepared on-site or prepared off-site and delivered, recipes need to provide a consistent quality and quantity of meals.**
- **Food preparation needs to present optimum flavor and appearance, while retaining nutrients and food value.**
  
- **Home-delivered meal packaging and packing –**
  - **Meals packaged at nutrition sites must be individually packaged before congregate meals are served. Whether home-delivered meals are packaged at nutrition sites or pre-plated at food preparation centers, they must be individually packaged, packed in insulated food carriers, and transported immediately.**
  - **All food delivery carriers must meet National Sanitation Foundation standards and must be sanitized daily by the food service provider.**
  - **Divided containers with air-tight seals must be used for hot food.**
  - **Bread must not be placed on top of other food.**
  - **Cold and hot food must be packaged and packed separately.**
  - **Individual containers with tight-fitting coverings must be used for all cold food. Sealable "sandwich" type bags may be used for bread.**

Practice Guidelines

Permits/Inspections/Grade Cards

Each congregate nutrition program site should be located at an approved public or private facility meeting the following requirements:

- (a) Each site has a "Permit to Operate" from the local health department prior to opening.
- (b) Each site has a current Health Department inspection "grade card" posted.

Nutrition sites with on-site food preparation are inspected like restaurants on a quarterly basis. On the other hand, catered congregate nutrition sites are

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inspected by local health departments only one time per calendar year. It is possible for more than 12 months to lapse between inspections and perhaps be closer to 2 years if a site is inspected at the beginning of one calendar year and then again near the end of the next.

Since nutrition sites are inspected or monitored by both Environmental Health Specialists and AAAs, both may be involved in corrective actions by a nutrition program. The Division of Aging expects local programs to maintain the highest quality of service delivery possible with a sanitation grade of "A" or 90%. However, a facility where food is prepared or served may drop below a grade of "A" or 90% and still be allowed to operate by the health department. Points may be deducted for deficiencies in buildings used by other programs not subject to Environmental Health rules or in buildings managed by entities not willing to address deficiencies identified by the Environmental Health Specialist. Communities are not always able to locate nutrition programs in ideal buildings if they want to offer meals in areas where people need them the most. These competing factors need to be resolved in the best interest of participants by nutrition providers, local health specialists, and AAAs. The main purpose of the DOA Administrative requirement is to have the AAA be informed and actively participating in providing support and oversight to a local nutrition program that falls below a grade of "A" or 90% as required by the Division's nutrition standards. The nutrition program may continue to operate at the AAA's discretion while efforts are made to resolve deficiencies, so long as the health department does not withdraw its permit to operate. The nutrition program must take corrective action within 7 days of the sanitation rating falling below an "A" or 90%.

### Overview of Food Temperature Requirements

Providers are expected to comply with the temperature requirements of 15A NCAC 18A .2600 [specifically .2609 (g)], but all holding time requirements have been deleted from the Division of Aging service standards. The length of time between end of preparation and delivery must now be controlled through food contracts, and providers are strongly encouraged to assure the shortest holding time possible by the caterer or the agency. Maintaining temperatures at safe levels while preserving food quality, taste, and appearance depends on these contract provisions and fast delivery.

Temperature control is a part of the risk management procedures that an agency undertakes to protect all parties. There are clear challenges in maintaining temperatures in Older Americans Act nutrition programs. Whereas restaurants cook and serve food, most of our nutrition programs cook, hold, and then serve meals. Challenges include the length of time between preparation and serving, the adequacy of equipment for maintaining temperatures, the number of people

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involved in handling and distributing meals, and the distance between drop-off points and clients.

Sometimes a lapse in procedures may lead to unpalatable food, and other times it may lead to foodborne illness. For this reason, all nutrition programs are required to document food temperatures and adhere to other risk management procedures, including the following:

- End of preparation time for food not prepared on-site and arrival time at the drop-off location must be documented. Even though there are no time requirements between end of food preparation and meals being dropped off, this is basic documentation for the line of control and responsibility for meals should there ever be a question related to foodborne illness in connection to the nutrition program meals.
- Packaging and transport equipment must maintain appropriate food temperatures.
- If congregate sites use warming or refrigeration equipment prior to serving food, then temperatures must also be taken and recorded at the time food is delivered.
- All hot food must be at least 140 ° F and all cold food 45 ° F or below at the time it is delivered or served to a participant.
- Time and temperatures must be taken just prior to serving congregate meals.
- Temperatures must be recorded for each food item on a menu, except bread products, crackers, cake, fresh fruit, and fruit cobblers.
- Home-delivered meals packaged at nutrition sites must be packaged before congregate meals are served, placed in insulated containers, and transported immediately. All home-delivered meals pre-plated by a caterer must be individually packaged, packed, and transported immediately.
- Temperatures must be taken at least once per month on each nutrition route. The nutrition program should evaluate whether it is more feasible to order an extra meal for the temperature check or to train staff to take the temperature from a participant tray without contaminating the food.
- All temperature records must be maintained for audit.
- If food temperatures are out of compliance at the time it is delivered to a home-delivered meal participant, corrective action plan must be implemented and documented. Possible solutions may include redesigning shorter routes, using heat stones, or using better equipment.

Providers may use an Environmental Health requirement to be judged on time rather than food temperature compliance. This entails a special process to obtain approval from the local Environmental Health Specialist in advance of the food being prepared [see rule .2609 (h) of 15A NCAC 18A .2600]. This requirement states that food must be served to the public within two hours of completing the cooking process or when food is otherwise removed from

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required temperature controls. With prior approval from the Health Department, this provision allows a specified food item to be served below 140 degrees or above 45 degrees as applicable, but all of the unserved food must be thrown out after two hours.

Other Food Safety Issues

Nutrition rules require that agencies educate participants and staff about the sources and prevention of foodborne illness. This is especially important if unserved food leftover at a congregate nutrition site is taken home by participants or donated to food pantries or homeless programs. Agencies need to have guidelines regarding the handling and storage of leftover food.

Attachment C

Location of Nutrition Sites

Louisburg Senior Center

127 Shannon Village

Louisburg, NC 27549

Franklinton Senior Center

602 E Mason St

Franklinton, NC 27525

Range of Meals Required

Total: 130 – 150 meals per day