

**NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

**DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

**MICHAEL F. EASLEY, GOVERNOR  
WILLIAM G. ROSS JR., SECRETARY  
TERRY L. PIERCE, DIRECTOR  
BART CAMPBELL, SECTION CHIEF**



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Environmental Health Directors, Supervisors, and Coordinators

**THROUGH:** Jim Hayes, Head  
Pools, Tattoos and State Institutions Branch

**FROM:** Alice Isley, Regional Environmental Health Specialist  
Dairy and Food Protection Branch

Larry D. Michael, Field Supervisor  
Children's Environmental Health Branch

**DATE:** October 31, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Food Handling for Special Needs Students

Several counties have encountered situations at schools involving food handling and diapering for children with special needs in rooms that are not designed for such activities. The following are recommended "best practices" for maintaining sanitation while handling some of the difficult situations schools encounter with some special needs students. These are not rules and cannot be enforced, but they are good public health recommendations for schools dealing with special needs children. We would suggest that the unhealthy situations and the recommended solutions be documented on the Comment Addendum sheet during school inspections. These recommendations will be suggested for incorporation in an upcoming review of the *Rules Governing Sanitation of Public, Private and Religious Schools* (15A NCAC 18A .2400).

Here are some specific concerns:

1. In general, food prepared in the school should be done in a permitted area such as the school lunchroom. However, special needs classes may necessitate some in-room food handling. When students need help with simple food preparation activities, such as heating food in a microwave or opening containers, teachers should wash their hands prior to helping students. Food preparation activities that are more involved (e.g., blending foods) should be done in the school lunchroom or at the child's home. Drinking water should not be obtained from handwash lavatories, but should be obtained from the cafeteria, nearby water fountain or bottled water.

2. Diapering should be conducted in a designated area, equipped with cleaning and sanitizing solutions and handwash lavatory separate from that used for handwashing prior to food preparation or food consumption. Approved procedures should be posted and used.
3. When teachers assist or feed children, they must wash their hands before and between each oral feeding, or between each individual assisted.
4. Multi-use utensil washing and sanitizing should only be conducted in the school lunchroom. If the washing is done as part of a learning activity, the utensils should be cleaned and sanitized in the school lunchroom prior to use for food service.
5. Classroom refrigeration equipment used to hold potentially hazardous foods should be capable of maintaining proper cold holding temperatures and should contain an accurate thermometer. Domestic blenders/food processors provided by a child's family should be labeled with the child's name, cleaned and sanitized after each use or sent home for cleaning after each use, and stored in the lunchroom.
6. If potty chairs are used, they should be located and stored in a toilet room equipped with a spray rinse toilet or utility sink. Potty chairs shall be emptied, rinsed, cleaned and disinfected after each use.
7. Feeding syringes should be handled as discussed in the memo "Cleaning of Feeding Tubes and Handwashing" from; Deborah W. Harris, RN: through; Ed Norman, MPH, Program Supervisor, Children's Environmental Health Branch.
8. Special needs equipment should be kept clean and in good repair.
9. Toys and other mouth-contact surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized at least daily when used and more frequently if visibly dirty. Proper methods can be found in 15A NCAC 18A .2822(a).

For further information, please contact your Regional Environmental Health Specialist.