

# Compliance with the USDA Meal Pattern and Other Helpful Hints

## USDA Meal Pattern Requirements

USDA developed Meal Pattern requirements to help child care providers prepare and serve the children at least the basic minimum requirements at meal and snack time. These requirements are not optional but are to be used by the provider in each meal served to the children.

In following the Meal Pattern a provider is able to offer a meal that meets the minimum portion sizes that fit the age of the child/children being served. The minimum standards do not mean that you can't serve more than is required, but must offer/serve at least the minimum that is specified.

### When your Field Services Representative visits:

At the time of the home visit the Field Services Representative will not only review the Menus but will also observe the portion sizes of the meal being served during the visit. It is expected that the provider will have posted the Meal Pattern in her meal preparation area so that she is able to correctly determine the portion sizes for the meal based on the Meal Pattern.

If the Meal Pattern is not being followed, the Field Services Representative will disallow the meal she observed and document the circumstances on the Review form. She will also provide Technical Assistance to help the provider understand the scope of the violation.

It is at this time that the Field Services Representative also provides Technical Assistance if the provider is not offering all of the meal components to the children at the same time. This includes if milk or fruit is being withheld until other food items have been consumed by the children.

## Helpful Shopping and Storage Hints

National Food Service Management Institute ([www.nsfmi.org](http://www.nsfmi.org)) is a wonderful resource for hints on:

- how to shop
- what to shop for
- how to store the foods that you purchase in transport
- when you get the food home
- how to store food in case of a power outage

## Hand Washing

We have also provided a wonderful handout on Hand Washing Techniques. In our visits to providers we have observed the following practices which are not recommended that providers use:

- children wash hands using a communal bucket or tub
- children dry hands using a communal towel
- children are given wipes rather than soap and water at the provider's home
- children are given Antibacterial Gel rather than soap and water at the provider's home

Wipes and Antibacterial Gel should only be used when soap and water are not available, such as at the park.