The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Elder Affairs
38 Chauncy Street, Boston, Mass. 02111

MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS
GOVERNOR

PAUL J. LANZIKOS
SECRETARY

PROGRAM INSTRUCTION

EOEA-PI-89- 37

TO: Area Agencies on Aging
Nutrition Projects

FROM: Paul J. Lanzikos

SUBJ: Food Leaving Mealsites

DATE: July 11,1989

The Massachusetts Association of Elderly Nutrition Programs (MAENP) has requested that Elder Affairs examine and clarify its current policy on foods which are permitted to leave mealsites. The policy in the past has been to allow only wrapped breads and baked desserts and fresh fruits to be taken home by mealsite participants due to food safety concerns. Foods which contain significant amounts of protein (e.g., entrees, salads) spoil quickly when not maintained within specific temperature ranges. Therefore, the policy of Elder Affairs in this matter was designed to protect the health of participants.

Recently, Elder Affairs has met with the nutrition project directors to listen to their concerns about allowing foods to leave the mealsites. Local nutrition project directors report that congregate mealsite participants on occasion request to take food home from sites for themselves or for a spouse who could not attend the site due to illness. Concerns regarding food safety, liability, and management issues were also discussed.

Elder Affairs herein issues a revised policy which maintains previous prohibitions regarding the types of foods which may leave sites and which additionally outlines the procedure for providing meals to congregate mealsite participants who are unable to attend a mealsite due to illness.

In the case of congregate meals:

The following foods are permitted to leave mealsites:

wrapped breads and baked desserts
fresh fruit and individually portioned canned fruit
unopened milk

Special note: the practice of allowing milk to leave mealsites is not encouraged due to the protein content of milk. However, because certain religious laws prohibit the drinking of milk with a meat-containing meal, Elder Affairs shall permit milk to be taken home for later consumption. Participants should be advised to bring the milk directly home and refrigerate immediately.

The following foods may not leave mealsites:

entree items
vegetable/salad items
soups
any other food item not specifically mentioned above as permitted to leave the mealsites.

When a congregate mealsite participant is ill, every effort should be made to provide the participant with a home delivered meal as soon as possible through the established home delivered meals system. Delivery in this manner assures that meals will be delivered at appropriate temperatures. Home delivered meals assessments should be performed as with any other home delivered meals client.

If a congregate participant informs the nutrition project that he/she will not be able to attend the mealsite due to illness and a home delivered meal cannot be arranged, then an emergency meal pack may be sent home with a friend/spouse to be delivered to the participant. The emergency meal pack should nutritionally provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances and should be shelf-stable (i.e., canned and dried foods which are kept in limited quantities at mealsites for this purpose). It may be complemented by the parts of the meal served that day that are allowed to leave mealsites (e.g., fruit, bread). Before a site manager provides this meal, the nutrition project director should be notified and approval given.

In addition, a concern has been raised about wasting meals when a participant who has reserved a meal does not come to the mealsite. Some suggested procedures on eliminating waste are:

a. Reinforce reservation system and portion control.
b. If a "no show" occurs, offer seconds instead of throwing away the meal.
c. Sell to the staff in the building on a market price.

If you should have any questions regarding this policy, please contact Shirley Chao, Nutrition Program Manager, at 617/727-7751 (ext. 319).