



Mecklenburg County Health Department

FAMILY STYLE DINING: Sanitation Guidelines

October 2006

The current NC Child Care Sanitation rules allow for family style dining (15A NCAC 18A .2808(g)) provided adequate supervision of children is maintained. Various organizations and groups promote and encourage this practice with varying degrees of guidelines. For example, the publication “CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN : National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care”, 2nd Edition, has several references to children ‘feeding’ themselves. A joint publication of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, University of Colorado, this reference lists various standards, recommendations, and guidelines associated with child feeding. Standards 3 and 4 within this publication address ‘self-feeding’ by children and protective measures needed in place.

The licensing agency for child cares in NC, the NC DHHS Division of Child Development & Early Education, does not define family style dining nor do its laws or regulations specifically address the practice other than to state that ‘food shall be served in a manner to minimize the possibility of contamination’ (10A NCAC 09 .0805(a)). That said, Mecklenburg County has adopted the following guidelines, using the Sanitation rules, to assess family style dining when observed:

1. Food shall be protected at all times from contamination including unnecessary handling, coughs and sneezes
(Reference-Section .2806 (f) Food Storage and Protection). Examples of events include:
 - If a child dispensing food from a bulk container (bowl) is observed to touch either the food contact surface of the serving utensil or the bulk food itself
 - Children coughing, sneezing, etc. on bulk container or dispensing utensil observed
 - Children serving other children is prohibited as the supervision activity must be by employees, not children
2. Dispensing utensils shall be properly stored between uses (Reference-Section .2808 (e) Food Service). Generally this means in the food product with handle extended outward.
3. Child hand washing is strictly complied with (Reference-Section .2803 Handwashing). Although child handwashing is required before and after eating, regardless of serving style, non-compliance with good practices could negate family style dining approval.
4. A communicable disease occurrence or outbreak can void family style dining approval (Reference-Section .2808 (g) Food Service). This activation could also include children with draining wounds, lesions, etc. which are not properly bandaged.

All of these items rely on the ‘adequate’ supervision component to be adhered to.

PEOPLE • PRIDE • PROGRESS • PARTNERSHIPS

Environmental Health Division • 700 N. Tryon Street, Suite 208 • Charlotte, NC 28202-2222 • (704) 336-5100
<http://envhealth.charmeck.org>