



# Managing Food Allergies in Schools

## The Role of School Nutrition Professionals



### Overview

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*, ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/)) to help schools manage the risk of food allergies and severe allergic reactions in students. As a school nutrition professional, you need to know how to keep students with food allergies safe while eating meals and snacks at school.



### Did you know?

- A food allergy is an adverse immune system reaction that occurs soon after exposure to a certain food.
- In a typical classroom of 25 students, at least one student is likely to be affected by food allergies, and for reasons that are not completely understood, the number of children with food allergies is increasing.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Food allergy reactions can be unpredictable. About 1 of 4 students who have a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction at school have no previous known food allergy.<sup>4,5</sup>



**About 20% of students with food allergies (1 of 5) will have a reaction while at school.<sup>3</sup>**



## What can you do?

### ✓ Participate in your school's planning for managing food allergies.

- Help your school plan and implement a Food Allergy Management and Prevention Plan (FAMPP). Learn more about emergency plans. ([http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13\\_243135\\_A\\_Food\\_Allergy\\_Web\\_508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf))

### ✓ Get trained and help manage food allergies at your school.

- Participate in school-based training and review resources to help recognize the signs and symptoms of food allergies and how to respond in an emergency. (<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/>)
- Ask the school nurse or school administrator for information on current school district policies and practices for managing students with food allergies, including which students in your school have known food allergies, how to manage medications, and how to respond to a food allergy reaction.
- Help communicate appropriate actions to all food service staff on how to avoid allergic reactions and respond to food allergy emergencies

### ✓ Prepare for and respond to food allergy emergencies.

- Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that usually develops rapidly and may cause death.<sup>7</sup>
- Do not send a student with a possible food allergy reaction to the nurse or office alone.
- The recommended treatment for anaphylaxis is the prompt use of an injectable medication called epinephrine and calling the emergency medical system (911).
- If you suspect a severe food allergy reaction, or anaphylaxis, take immediate action, including activating the emergency plan and being ready to administer an epinephrine auto-injector, if you are a delegated and trained staff member.<sup>3-5</sup>
- Immediately contact the school administrator and school nurse if you suspect an allergic reaction or exposure to a known allergen.
- Be sure to tell the nurse or responsible administrator that it is an allergy emergency.

### ✓ Help prevent food allergy reactions in the cafeteria.

- Be able to recognize students with food allergies in the cafeteria. Use point of purchase alerts to identify students with food allergies, if possible.
- Work with the school nurse or administrator to identify students with food allergies in a way that does not compromise students' privacy or confidentiality rights.
- Understand how to read food labels to identify allergens in foods and beverages served in school meals and snacks. Ingredients can change frequently.
- Be prepared to share information with parents about ingredients in recipes and all food served by the school nutrition program. Work with parents, school nurse, and administrator to manage food substitutions for students with food allergies.
- Prevent cross-contact of potential food allergens during food preparation and service on utensils, equipment and surfaces. Wash hands during food preparation.<sup>8</sup>
  - ◆ Develop and follow procedures for handling food allergies in the cafeteria, even if a student is not participating in the school meal program.
  - ◆ Develop and follow procedures for cleaning food preparation areas and cafeteria tables and chairs.<sup>8</sup>
  - ◆ Support hand washing by students before and after eating.
  - ◆ Discourage trading or sharing of food.

### ✓ Help ensure a healthy and safe school environment.

- Provide food allergy education to students and parents.
- Make sure that food allergy policies and practices address competitive foods, including foods sold in vending machines and other venues and served at times other than meal times.
- Report all cases of bullying and harassment against students, including those with food allergies, to the school administrator, school nurse, or school counselor.

## Know the Eight Food Groups Which Cause Most Serious Food Allergy Reactions

Most food allergies are caused by these eight food groups.<sup>6</sup>  
Any food can cause an allergic reaction, however.



MILK



EGGS



FISH



SHELLFISH



WHEAT



SOY



PEANUTS



TREE NUTS

## Learn to recognize food allergy symptoms in children

Food allergy symptoms can include

- swollen lips, tongue, or eyes;
- itchiness, rash, or hives;
- nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea;
- congestion, hoarse voice, or trouble swallowing;
- wheezing or difficulty breathing; dizziness, fainting, or loss of consciousness;
- and mood change or confusion.



Children with food allergies might communicate their symptoms in the following ways:

- It feels like something is poking my tongue.
- My tongue (or mouth) is tingling (or burning).
- My tongue (or mouth) itches.
- My tongue feels like there is hair on it.
- My mouth feels funny.
- There's a frog in my throat; there's something stuck in my throat.
- My tongue feels full (or heavy).
- My lips feel tight.
- It feels like there are bugs in there (to describe itchy ears).
- It (my throat) feels thick.
- It feels like a bump is on the back of my tongue or throat.<sup>6</sup>



## Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. 2013. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/)

Allergyhome.org. Resources for schools: <http://www.allergyhome.org/schools/school-nutrition/>

Food Allergy Resource and Education (FARE). Managing Food Allergies in the Cafeteria website: <http://www.foodallergy.org/schools/cafeteria>

National Association of School Nurse (NASN). Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Tool Kit: <http://www.nasn.org/ToolsResources/FoodAllergyandAnaphylaxis>

NEA Health Information Network. Food Allergy Book: What School Employees Need to Know: <http://www.neahin.org/educator-resources/foodallergybook.html>

School Nutrition Association. Food Allergy Resource Center: <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=17241>

US Food and Drug Administration. Food Allergies: What You Need to Know: <http://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/consumers/ucm079311.htm>



## References

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8. *Food Code, 2009 Recommendations of the United States Public Health Service, Food and Drug Administration*, National Technical Information Service Publication PB2009112613. <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/FoodCode2009/UCM189448.pdf> Accessed June 25, 2014.