

# Food Allergies in School: What We Need to Know



## Why We Need to Know

- The 8 most common food allergies are peanut, tree nut, milk, egg, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish, accounting for over 90% of all food allergies.
- There are over 150 deaths each year from food allergy induced anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction in which blood pressure drops suddenly and airways constrict).
- Nuts account for 92% of severe or fatal reactions.
- Schools are a frequent site for accidental ingestion of a food allergen. The *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* has stated that 1 in 5 students with food allergies will have a reaction during school.

## Know the symptoms of allergic reaction and anaphylaxis:

Hives	Vomiting	Itching	Diarrhea
Swelling	Stomach Cramps	Red, Watery Eyes	Voice Change
Runny Nose	Coughing	Wheezing	Difficulty Swallowing
Throat Tightness	Itchy Mouth Area	Fainting	Dizziness
Blue Lips	Pale or Flushed Skin	Unconsciousness	

### A Child May Describe Symptoms As:

- This food's too spicy.
- My tongue is hot (or burning).
- It feels like something is poking my tongue.
- My tongue (or mouth) is tingling (or burning).
- My tongue (or mouth) itches.
- It (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 (throat).

Source: Family and Consumer Sciences, Health Hints [http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/child\\_health/child\\_health.php](http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/child_health/child_health.php)

## How Schools Can Help

- School administrators, school nurses, teachers, food service departments and bus drivers should work together as a multi-disciplinary team to make sure Individual Health Care Plans and Allergy Action Plans are in place and followed.
- Provide education within the food service department on the risks associated with cross-contamination.
- Make hand washing mandatory both before and after eating.
- Institute a strict policy prohibiting students from sharing food or drinks.
- Ensure surfaces are washed with warm water and soap after snacks, meals, food related arts and crafts and functions.
- Be aware that food does not necessarily need to be ingested to trigger an allergic reaction. Contact can be airborne, from residue on surfaces, from food based arts and crafts or science projects, or even from an ingredient in the class pet's food.
- Consider a monthly, non-food based birthday celebration so that parents are not sending in food that may be unsafe.

## How Parents Can Help

- Inform the school immediately if your child has any food allergies. Also supply a list of ingredients to avoid. Be sure to include "hidden" ingredients.
- Be part of the development of an Individual Health Care Plan and an Allergy Action Plan with the school nurse and school administrators.
- Provide the school with proper medical documentation of allergies, history of reactions, and any necessary paperwork to administer treatment.
- Provide the school with up-to-date epinephrine auto-injectors.
- Talk to your children about food allergies and the dangers of sharing food and drinks.

## Additional Resources

- MA Dept. of Education <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/allergy.pdf>
- American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology <http://www.acaai.org/public/facts/foodkids.htm>
- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology [http://www.aaaai.org/patients/just4kids/classroom\\_corner/default.stm](http://www.aaaai.org/patients/just4kids/classroom_corner/default.stm)
- The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network <http://www.foodallergy.org/links.html>