Food Allergies and Anaphylaxis in School: What School Staff Need to Know

What is an Allergy?

When the body's immune system wrongly identifies an otherwise harmless substance (an allergen) as harmful.

What is an Allergen?

- Allergens are substances that cause an overreaction of the body's defense mechanisms
- Allergens may be:
  - Inhaled (pollen, dust, molds, fumes)
  - Touched (soap, plants)
  - Injected (insect venom, medicines)
  - Eaten (food and medicines)

The Major 8 Food Allergens

- Milk
- Eggs
- Peanut
- Tree nut
- Fish
- Shell fish
- Soy
- Wheat





These make up 90% of all food allergies in the United States

Symptoms

- Swelling or redness
- Hives
- Watery or swollen eyes
- Nausea and vomiting
- Cough and scratchy throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Changes in voice or cry
- Anxiety
- Dizziness and faintness
- Unconsciousness

These symptoms can range from mild to severe, they can occur very suddenly or gradually

Food Allergy Facts

- **Anaphylaxis (anaphylaxis shock):** an allergic reaction in which the release of histamines causes extreme symptoms including: swelling, difficulty breathing, heart failure, sometimes death

Other Causes of Anaphylaxis

- Stinging insects
- Latex
- Medication
- Exercise
- Environmental triggers
- Cold environment
- Unknown reason

*Discuss appropriate management with your school nurses

Treatment Options

- Remove the child from contact with known or suspected allergen
- Refer to their plan of care for directions
- Give medications as directed (anti-histamines or epinephrine injection)
- Monitor for symptoms
- Notify parents as noted in the care plan

Children's Descriptions of Reactions

- Complains of tongue: hot, tingling, burning, itching or feeling funny, full or heavy
- Feels like:
  - there is a frog in my throat
  - bump on the back of my tongue
  - lips feel tight
  - bugs in ears
  - Something poking my tongue

Call 911 for any of the following

- Sudden or increasingly severe
  - swelling and/or hives
  - abdominal pain, nausea or vomiting
  - difficulty breathing or speaking

Key Points about Food Allergy Reactions

- 1st time allergic reactions can happen in school
- Fatal or near-fatal reactions are rare but do occur
- 40 deaths annually from insect stings
- 200 deaths annually from allergic responses to food
- 3-5% of children under 6 and 2-2 ½% of adults have food allergies
- **Early recognition** and **treatment** of anaphylaxis can be **life saving**

Label Reading is Key

- Each label on food should be read every time
  - Ingredients in products can change without warning
- Understanding labeling laws and their limitations is important

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings per Container 2

Amount Per Serving

Calories 280	**Calories from Fat** 120
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 2mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 3g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	

Vitamin A 4%	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	Iron 4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act:

- Exceptions:
  - Foods that do not need clear labeling
    - Any food not regulated by the FDA
      - Includes most meats, poultry, certain egg products and most alcoholic beverages
    - Any other foods not in the major 8, such as:
      - Sesame or other seeds
      - Molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, scallops and others)
      - Gluten (except for wheat)
        - Barley, rye, or oats (hidden in malt, dextrins, flavors)

Avoid products with advisory labeling for allergen of concern

- Statements (numerous formats and no regulation)
  - “may contain…”
  - “processed in a facility that…”
  - “manufactured on shared equipment with…”
  - Etc.

Hidden Ingredients

- Not an obvious component of food
- Just looking at the food is not enough to tell if an allergen is in it
- If there is an item that does not have a label, it is safest to avoid eating it

Food Sources in Non-Edible Items

- Finger paint: milk or egg whites
- Shaving cream: milk
- Paste: wheat
- Play dough: wheat
- Bean bags: beans, nuts or seeds

High Risk Situations

- Outside food in schools (birthdays, celebrations, cultural days, bake sales, etc.)
- Breaks in school routine and field trips
- School bus and transportation
- Transitions in care and substitute staff

For More Information

- The Food Allergy Network: www.foodallergy.org
- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology: 1-800-822-2762
- American Academy of Pediatrics: 1-800-433-9016