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
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