



# Managing Food Allergies in Schools

## The Role of School Teachers and Paraeducators



### 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 teacher, specialist, paraeducator, student teacher, substitute teacher, classroom aide, or classroom volunteer, you will need to know how to help students with food allergies be safe and supported 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>
- About 20% of students with food allergies (1 of 5) will have a reaction while at school.<sup>3</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>**



## What can you do?

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

- Know your school district's food allergy policies and practices and your school's Food Allergy Management and Prevention Plan.
- Help develop and carry out Section 504 and Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans as needed for students with food allergies.

### ✓ 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 policies and practices for managing students with food allergies, including which students in your classroom have known food allergies, how to manage medications, and how to respond to a food allergy reaction.
- Keep copies of emergency care plans for your students in a secure place that you and substitute teachers can get to easily in an emergency.
- With parental consent, share information and responsibilities with substitute teachers and other adults who regularly work in the classroom.
- Work with parents, school administrators, and other school staff to prevent bullying and discrimination against students with food allergies and report all cases of bullying to parents and the school administrator.<sup>6-7</sup>

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

- Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death.<sup>9</sup>
- Do not send a student with a suspected allergic reaction to the school nurse alone.
- The recommended treatment for anaphylaxis is the prompt use of an injectable medication called epinephrine.
- If you suspect a severe food allergy reaction, or anaphylaxis, take immediate action including

activating the student's emergency plan and be ready to administer an epinephrine auto-injector, if you are a delegated and trained staff member.<sup>3-5</sup>

- Call the emergency medical system (911) immediately after administering the epinephrine auto-injector.
- Immediately contact the school administrator and school nurse after any suspected allergic reaction or exposure to a known allergen.

### ✓ Help prevent food allergy emergencies.

- Work with parents, school nurse, and other appropriate school personnel to determine if any classroom modifications are needed to make sure students with food allergies can participate fully in class activities.
- Inform parents and the school nurse before any activities in the classroom that may include food or known allergens.

### ✓ Create and maintain a healthy and safe classroom and school environment.

- Follow school district rules and practices for dealing with food allergies.
- Review rules with students and parents.
- Avoid using allergens in classroom activities, including arts and crafts, counting, science projects, parties, holiday and celebration treats, or cooking.
- Use nonfood items for celebrations, rewards or incentives, such as special privileges, extra recess, and small non-food prizes. Learn about some great nonfood reward ideas. ([http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/foodrewards\\_290201\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/foodrewards_290201_7.pdf))
- Ensure a safe eating environment for students by providing supervision in the cafeteria, when meals or snacks are served in the classroom, on field trips, and during extracurricular activities.
  - Enforce hand washing before and after eating.
  - Clean surfaces to prevent cross-contact of allergens when meals or snacks are served in the classroom.
  - Do not allow students to trade or share food.



## Prepare for field trips

Use this checklist to remember important actions to take before every field trip:

- ❑ Determine if the field trip location is safe for students with food allergies. Reschedule or cancel if accommodations cannot be made safe.
- ❑ Invite parents of students with food allergies to chaperone or go with their child on the field trip. Parents cannot be required to attend field trips with their child.
- ❑ Work ahead of time with school food service staff to plan safe meals and snacks for students with food allergies.
- ❑ Let the school nurse know ahead of time if you are going on a field trip.
- ❑ Take student emergency care plans, emergency contact information, and emergency medication with you on the field trip.
- ❑ Know where the nearest emergency medical facilities are located when at the field trip site.
- ❑ Work with the school nurse or school administrator to ensure a staff member is trained to administer emergency epinephrine attends the field trip. Only a trained staff member or parent of an individual student should carry and administer emergency medication on field trips. In some circumstances, a student may also be authorized to carry their own epinephrine.
- ❑ If a food allergy emergency occurs, follow the student's emergency care plan and notify parents, school administrator, and school nurse.
- ❑ Make sure your phone is charged so you can respond quickly during an emergency.
- ❑ Return medication immediately after the field trip to the school nurse or staff member responsible for student medication management.

## 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>8</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/healthyouth/foodallergies/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/foodallergies/)

Allergyhome.org resources for schools. Available at: <http://www.allergyhome.org/schools/>

Food Allergy Resource and Education (FARE). Available at: <http://www.foodallergy.org/resources/schools>

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

National School Boards Association, Safe at School and Ready to Learn Policy Guide. Available at: <http://www.nsba.org/services/school-board-leadership-services/food-allergieschool-health>



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8. The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network. *Food Allergy News*. 2003;13(2).
9. Sampson HA, Muñoz-Furlong A, Campbell RL, et al. Second symposium on the definition and management of anaphylaxis: summary report—Second National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease/Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network Symposium. *Ann Emerg Med*. 2006;47(4):373-380.