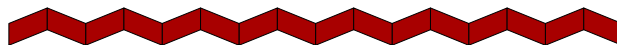




MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES IN SCHOOL



Safety & Security Fact Sheet

✓ **WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?**

In the case of a true food allergy, the body's immune system recognizes a reaction-provoking substance, or allergen, in the food--usually a protein--as foreign and produces antibodies to halt the allergen's "invasion." As the battle rages, symptoms appear throughout the body. The most common sites at which symptoms appear are the mouth (swelling of the lips), the digestive tract (stomach cramps, vomiting, diarrhea), the skin (hives, rashes, or eczema), and the airways (wheezing or breathing problems).

✓ **WHAT FOODS ARE THE MORE COMMON SOURCES OF ALLERGIES?**

The more common food allergens are certain proteins found in cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish, and tree nuts.

✓ **WHAT IS FOOD INTOLERANCE?**

Food intolerance does not involve the immune system. It is an abnormal physical reaction to a food or food additive often related to an enzyme deficiency. For example, people who are deficient in the intestinal enzyme lactase have difficulty digesting milk sugar (lactose). This is known as lactose intolerance.

✓ **CAN A FOOD ALLERGY BE LIFE THREATENING?**

The most severe type of food allergy reaction is called anaphylaxis, an acute allergic reaction that may include the sudden onset of hives, difficulty breathing, swelling of the mouth and throat, a drop in blood pressure, and loss of consciousness. Without immediate medical attention, death may occur.

✓ **SHOULD A LIFE-THREATENING FOOD BE BANNED FROM THE SCHOOL OR CLASSROOM?**

Realistically, school administrators cannot control what foods or ingredients students or their parents might bring to school. A food ban would be impossible to enforce. According to a national organization, The Food Allergy Network, a ban may create a false sense of security that could be disastrous since diligence is key to preventing allergic reactions. Instead, a safety net should be created around those students who are at risk.

✓ **WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ASSURE THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN AT RISK?**

Identify students with life-threatening allergies, learn as much as possible about their allergies, take measures to protect them, and be prepared to handle any severe reactions that occur despite precautions. An identification sheet with the student's name, photo, specific allergy (e.g., peanut or bee sting), warning signs of the reaction, and emergency treatment should be distributed to all appropriate persons. In certain cases, a health care plan should be developed, in coordination with the student's physician, and followed by school staff members. **Refer to FCPS Regulation 2104 (most recent version), Health Services--Specific Health Care Procedures.**



✓ **IS IT POSSIBLE TO REDUCE A STUDENT'S EXPOSURE TO AN ALLERGENIC FOOD IN THE SCHOOL SETTING?**

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) acknowledges that it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely avoid all allergy-causing foods because they can be hidden or accidentally introduced. AAAAI believes, however, that students' exposure to allergy-causing foods can be reduced within the school setting by taking the following precautions:

- Conduct a schoolwide food allergy awareness program for the entire staff to ensure that everyone will know what to do if an accidental allergic reaction occurs.
- Consider the creation of an allergen-free classroom by establishing a few simple rules about what would be allowed for snacks or used in instruction and in arts and crafts activities.
- Discuss food allergies with classmates and inform them of the need for their tolerance and understanding.
- Inform the parents of the classmates about this health issue and seek their cooperation in reinforcing classroom food rules with their children.
- Know the technical names, the common names, and any synonyms of common food ingredients. Read labels carefully to avoid giving hidden ingredients to students at risk.
- Be aware of the potential for food cross-contamination while handling, preparing, and serving food. Even minute quantities of certain foods can be life threatening.
- Encourage all classmates to wash their hands before and after eating.
- Consider the designation of an allergen-free lunchroom table, closely supervised by the lunchroom monitor. Friends of the allergic students would avoid bringing offending foods to the table so that they could all sit together.
- Discourage the trading and sharing of foods, food utensils, and food containers. Peer pressure to share food or be "normal" may lead some students to take risks. Discourage allergic students from trying unfamiliar foods.
- Wash tabletops and other surfaces; make sure that they are clean and free of any contaminating foods.
- Foods brought in for special events should be clearly identified. A complete list of ingredients should accompany noncommercial (unlabeled) foods.

The Food Allergy Network at <http://www.foodallergy.org>
The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology at <http://www.aaaai.org>.
If you need assistance, call the safety section at 571-423-2010,
or see your school health nurse.