

# Food Allergy Awareness



# What is an allergy?

- An allergy is an overreaction of the immune system that can affect any system in the body, including the skin, lungs, nasal passages, eyes, gastrointestinal tract, cardiovascular system, etc.
- Contact with or ingestion of foods and other substance can trigger this overreaction, causing a variety of symptoms including nausea, itching, and in severe cases, **anaphylaxis**.
- An anaphylactic reaction affects the whole body and can be fatal.

# Why should schools be concerned about food allergies?

- Food allergies affect 6-8% of school-age children.
- Half of those affected have a high risk of developing a life-threatening allergic reaction.
- About one in every six children with food allergies will have a reaction while in school.
- Even trace amounts of these foods can lead to severe and fatal reactions.
- Potentially fatal reactions can happen very quickly and must be treated immediately.

# What are the most common foods that cause allergies?

Any food, even mustard, has the potential to cause severe reactions in susceptible children. A child can have more than one food allergy.

- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Milk
- Eggs
- Wheat

We all need to work together as a team to make sure those with allergies are safe!



# Who's belongs on the team?

- Principals
- Nurses
- Teachers
- Food service staff
- Lunch monitors
- Bus drivers
- Counselors
- Physical education teachers & coaches
- Custodians



# What is the best way to prevent anaphylaxis?

- Protecting a student from exposure to the food (allergen) is the most important way to prevent anaphylaxis.
- Most anaphylactic reactions occur as a result of accidental exposure to the allergen.
- All possible steps should be taken to avoid exposure to food allergens at school.

# How can exposures to food allergens be avoided at school?

**Clear plans are needed to avoid exposure to food allergens:**

- Where lunch and snacks are served
- In all classroom areas of the school where foods may be used in projects
- On field trips
- At before-and after-school activities
- On the school bus





# Avoid exposure to a food: Cross-contamination

- Cross-contamination of a food allergen can occur during the cooking, serving, or clean-up of different foods with the same equipment.

- Cross- contamination can occur very easily.



Examples include:

- Slicing peanut butter and non-peanut butter sandwiches with the same knife.
- Cleaning different surfaces with the same sponge.

# Avoid Cross-Contamination

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A peanut-free or peanut only table should be established and maintained in the cafeteria or in classrooms where food is served

**After each meal service,  
all tables and chairs should  
be thoroughly washed  
with soap and water.**



# Students must be prohibited from sharing or trading food

- Cafeteria monitors should be trained to take note of the situation surrounding a child with allergies and intervene quickly to help prevent trading of food or bullying.



# Avoiding exposures to a food allergen in the classroom

- Information should be kept in the classroom about students' food allergies.
- These foods should not be used for class projects, parties, holidays, celebrations, arts and crafts, or science experiments.
- Food should not be used as a reward.
- Sharing or trading food or snacks in the classroom should be prohibited.

- Parents of the student with food allergies are responsible for providing safe classroom lunches and snacks for their child. These food should be kept in a separate snack box or chest.
- Tables should be washed with soap and water after food is served and in the morning if an event has been held in the classroom the night before.
- Proper hand washing technique by adults and children should be taught and required before and after the handling/consumption of food. If hand washing is not possible, vigorously rubbing of the hands with hand-sanitizing gel or wipes will help to remove food particles.

# Avoiding exposure on school field trips

- The parents of a child with food allergies should be invited but not required to accompany the child.
- In the absence of accompanying parents or a registered nurse, another trained individual must be assigned the task of watching out for the student's welfare and handling any emergency.
- Meals that may be food allergy-related should be avoided on field trips. Meals should be packaged appropriately to avoid cross-contamination and provided with two hand wipes per meal, for cleaning hands before and after meals.
- Location of nearest medical facility should be noted in case of an emergency.
- The person in-charge should have a cell phone or beeper for communication in case of an emergency.

# Before-and after-school activities

- Activities sponsored by the school must be consistent with school policies and procedures regarding life-threatening allergies.
- Instructions for accessing emergency medical service (EMS) should be posted in all areas.
- An individual who is responsible for keeping and administering medication during sporting events or other activities must be indentified.





# How can I recognize anaphylaxis?

**The most dangerous symptoms include breathing difficulties and a drop in blood pressure or shock.**

Symptoms may include:

- Flushing, tingling, or itchiness of the skin, swelling of lips or joints, hives or rash, paleness.
- A lump or tickle in the throat, throat tightness, hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, nasal congestion, runny nose, a feeling of “fullness” in the ears.
- Chest tightness, wheezing or high-pitched sounds from the lungs, shortness of breath.
- Nausea, abdominal cramps, bloating, vomiting, diarrhea.
- Sense of impending doom.
- Inconsolable crying, pointing to throat, ears, etc. Especially if a person is unable to verbalize symptoms.
- Lightheadedness, faintness, irregular or rapid heartbeat, confusion, passing out.