

Tips for Parents of Students with Potentially Life-Threatening (Severe) Allergies: Preparing for School Meals

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For the parent or caregiver of a child with severe allergies, sending the child off to school each day may cause feelings of concern, especially when it comes to eating meals or snacks at school, where a child may come into contact with allergic triggers. Anaphylaxis, a life-threatening allergic reaction, can happen anywhere. Educating your child and those around him/her about severe allergies and anaphylaxis can help him/her avoid his/her allergic triggers, and if necessary, manage an anaphylactic reaction.

Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening allergic reaction that has many possible triggers, occurs quickly, without warning and must be treated immediately with epinephrine. It occurs when someone comes into contact with a food or other item to which they are allergic. Food allergy is the most common cause of anaphylaxis, though it can also be triggered by insect stings, some medications, latex or other allergens. The most common food allergens that can cause anaphylaxis are cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (e.g., walnuts, cashews, pistachios, pecans, etc.), fish, shellfish, wheat and soy, many of which children can come in contact with at school.

These are some of the school-related activities that schools and students with food allergies will need to know how to navigate:

- ★ Lunch and Snack Time
- ★ Field Trips
- ★ School/Parent-Sponsored Activities
- ★ Athletic Events
- ★ After-School Care Programs
- ★ Food as Part of the Curriculum (e.g., festivals or historical events)
- ★ Holiday Celebrations
- ★ School Transportation
- ★ School Fundraisers

Recipe for Managing Life-Threatening Allergic Reaction Risk at School

Here are some tips to help your child, other students and school personnel recognize the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis and be ready to respond. Always discuss your child's severe allergies, allergy avoidance strategy, an emergency response plan and treatment options with your child's doctor.

- ★ Develop and review an Anaphylaxis Action Plan that lists out foods to which the student is allergic, symptoms of anaphylaxis and how to respond to and appropriately treat a reaction
- ★ Document the student's food allergy with the school
- ★ Schedule a meeting with the school nurse and appropriate school personnel, such as the homeroom teacher, to introduce the student and review the Anaphylaxis Action Plan

The Get Schooled in Anaphylaxis initiative offers practical information to educate the school community to help those at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions avoid their triggers, recognize anaphylaxis signs and symptoms and understand how to quickly get appropriate treatment and immediate medical care when anaphylaxis occurs.

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- ★ Obtain the school policy for handling meals and snacks for students with severe allergies (e.g., Is there an allergen-free zone or table in the cafeteria? Do all bake sale products have to be labeled?)
- ★ Stay informed about food-related activities/celebrations in school ahead of time; if the event is not allergen-friendly, help the student make his/her own similar allergen-free snack to bring in that day
- ★ Help your child be ready for unexpected activities/events involving food; remind him/her that strict avoidance of food allergens is the only way to reduce the risk of anaphylaxis
- ★ Remind your child to be his/her own advocate and try to avoid his/her allergy triggers. Remind him/her to:
 - » Inform other students about his/her severe allergies, how to recognize symptoms and when they should get an adult in case of an emergency
 - » Wash hands with soap/water or hand wipes before and after eating; use of hand sanitizers or water alone is not effective in removing the residue of known allergens
 - » Never share food or snacks with friends
- ★ Confirm that your child, students and/or school staff have immediate access to epinephrine for rapid response to life-threatening allergic reactions

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