

For some parents and guardians, sending a child with potentially life-threatening (severe) allergies off to school can feel like a daunting task. Successfully transitioning a child into school requires forming a partnership between parents or guardians and key individuals at the school, from teachers and classmates to school nurses and staff members. These relationships are critical to ensure all members of the school community are educated in anaphylaxis management, because anaphylaxis, a life-threatening allergic reaction, can happen anywhere.

**Below are some steps to build this partnership and manage severe allergies in the school setting:**

- ★ Become educated
- ★ Plan ahead
- ★ Build a team
- ★ Reduce allergens in the classroom
- ★ Teach children self-management
- ★ Manage school meals
- ★ Don't forget the school bus
- ★ Be ready for field trips and extracurricular activities

## Become Educated

- ★ Be well-versed on the specific allergic trigger(s). Some of the most common items that can cause a life-threatening allergic reaction include foods like cow's milk, eggs and peanuts; latex (found in balloons or gloves used for cleaning); and insect stings.
- ★ Learn how the school supports students who may be at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions and their treatment approach. Additionally, ask school administrators or the school nurse about setting up a 504 plan. According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, schools must ensure that programs and activities are accessible to and useable by persons with disabilities when the system's programs and activities are viewed in its entirety. When needed, accommodations for students living at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions may be captured in what is known as a 504 Individualized Accommodation Plan or "504 plan." Find out more at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html#>.\*
- ★ Teach children self-management. Make sure each child understands:
  - » Foods and/or environmental items that must be avoided
  - » How to recognize the signs and symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction
  - » How to describe a life-threatening allergic reaction to an adult in case of an emergency
  - » The correct way to administer epinephrine
  - » The importance of informing friends about his/her severe allergies

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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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## Plan Ahead

Providing information about a child's severe allergies and medications to the school is critical. Prior to the first day of school, a child with severe allergies should have an anaphylaxis action plan completed by his/her parent or guardian and allergist (or other licensed healthcare professional). The school may have its own form, or it may have a slightly different name.

The form should include:

- ★ A complete list of the child's allergic triggers
- ★ Possible symptoms of the child's life-threatening allergic reaction
- ★ The treatment that should be administered to the child and under what circumstances
- ★ Where the child's epinephrine is kept
- ★ Contact information for emergency medical services (e.g., 911), the child's allergist and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s)
- ★ A current picture of the child
- ★ The signature of the child's allergist (or other licensed healthcare professional)

## Build a Team

Supporting students with severe allergies at school involves a team of individuals, including parents or guardians, teachers, nurses, administrators and key staff members. The school nurse is a critical member of the child's anaphylaxis management team while at school. Parents or guardians and their child should meet with the school nurse first to discuss a plan of action should anaphylaxis occur.

In working with the team, recognize up front that some of the members might need additional time to learn about severe allergies and the steps needed to avoid allergens in the school setting. Parents and guardians should be involved in educating this team about the child's severe allergies, including reducing allergen exposure, recognizing symptoms and responding if anaphylaxis occurs.

Prior to the first day of school, members of the team should meet in person to:

- ★ Introduce themselves and share information about the child with severe allergies, including the child's anaphylaxis action plan
- ★ Provide information on the basics about anaphylaxis, clear up any misconceptions and discuss the role team members have in managing the child's severe allergy
- ★ Find out what team members already know about severe allergies
- ★ Ensure school personnel know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction, have access to epinephrine, know how to administer epinephrine in the case of anaphylaxis and know to seek emergency medical care after use

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## Reduce Allergens in the Classroom

Parents or guardians and teachers should discuss the role of allergens in the classroom. Determine whether strategies can be implemented to help avoid exposure to allergens and reduce the risk of a child having an anaphylactic reaction.

Such approaches may include:

- ★ Having a “no food sharing” or “no food trading” rule
- ★ Encouraging hand-washing after food handling and eating
- ★ Washing surfaces after eating or during class projects
- ★ Using non-food items for projects, academic rewards and classroom celebrations
- ★ Encouraging packaged food items with ingredient labels, as opposed to home-baked goods
- ★ Considering alternatives to products that may contain allergens, such as modeling clay, papier mâché, crayons and soaps
- ★ Being ready with allergy-friendly snacks for the entire class so that the child can eat what everyone else does
- ★ Keeping allergy-friendly, nonperishable meals in case lunch is compromised or in the event of a shelter-in-place emergency or evacuation to another location
- ★ Having students store their lunches in a designated location
- ★ Having the child's parent or guardian become a “classroom parent” to allow them advance notice of planned activities
- ★ Including the child's parent or guardian at class events, such as field trips, to help the teacher monitor the child's exposure to potential allergens
- ★ Making sure substitute teachers are informed of the child's severe allergies and are ready in case of an anaphylactic reaction

## Teach Children Self-Management

For children with severe allergies, reducing the risk of anaphylaxis involves making good choices, avoiding allergens and recognizing potentially dangerous situations. As children mature, learning how to manage their severe allergies is vitally important. The parent or guardian's role in each child's learning process is essential.

When appropriate, parents and guardians should teach children to:

- ★ Raise awareness of severe allergies among others (e.g., classmates, friends)
- ★ Avoid eating any food with unknown ingredients, such as home-baked goods
- ★ Avoid sharing or trading food with classmates
- ★ Wash hands regularly to help reduce exposure to allergens
- ★ Read product labels to identify potential allergens
- ★ Avoid environmental triggers (e.g., stinging insects)
- ★ Recognize the symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction
- ★ Tell an adult immediately if they suspect an anaphylactic reaction in themselves or a classmate
- ★ Inform friends about their severe allergies, including how to recognize symptoms and how to describe anaphylaxis to an adult in case of an emergency
- ★ Wear medical identification jewelry that can help convey severe allergy information to emergency medical personnel
- ★ Carry his or her prescribed epinephrine
- ★ Report bullying or teasing so that appropriate action can be taken

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## Manage School Meals

According to guidelines developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the federal agency overseeing the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program, schools must offer safe substitute meals to students with food allergies. Reach out to the school and Board of Education to find out if procedures exist at your child's school and to determine whether they are appropriate for your child. These instructions and forms can be integrated into the team's approach to managing a child's food allergies at school.

Parents or guardians should have a conversation with the school's food service director, preferably before the start of the school year, to find out how the school cafeteria manages students at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions and whether the approach is appropriate for their child.

## Don't Forget the School Bus

Many schools have procedures for managing severe allergies on buses/vans. Reach out to the school, Board of Education and bus company to find out if procedures exist at your child's school and to determine whether they are appropriate for your child. Keep in mind that children ride buses not only to and from school but also during field trips and for after-school activities. In some states, medication can be stored on the bus.

Common school bus/van procedures include:

- ★ A "no food" policy (unless medically necessary)
- ★ Equipping the bus driver with a cell phone or emergency radio device
- ★ Special seating arrangements
- ★ Training drivers to recognize the symptoms of anaphylaxis and know how to respond

## Plan Ahead for Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

A child's food allergy should not prevent him/her from attending field trips and participating in extracurricular activities. For children who are aware of the allergens that prompt a life-threatening allergic reaction, avoidance of their allergens is crucial. Parents should ask to be given advance notice about these events, allowing them to address any concerns.

Issues for parents, guardians, teachers and school staff to consider include:

- ★ Who will be responsible for recognizing anaphylaxis signs and symptoms and carrying the child's epinephrine?
- ★ Do the individuals in charge know how to recognize the symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction and respond should one occur?
- ★ Will the child be able to bring his or her own food?
- ★ If the child is to receive a special meal, such as a sack lunch not supplied by the child, who will ensure that the meal given to the child is allergy-friendly?
- ★ Will the children eat at a restaurant or other type of food service establishment? If so, special arrangements may be necessary.
- ★ What type of transportation will be involved (e.g., bus, van, private automobile)?

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# Understanding Anaphylaxis in Schools

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**ANAPHYLAXIS**<sup>®</sup>

## Prevent Bullying

The bullying of children with severe allergies must be taken seriously. Children with severe allergies have experienced anaphylaxis after being harassed with an actual allergen (e.g., smearing peanut butter on the face of a child who is allergic to peanuts).

Schools should enforce strong, proactive anti-bullying prevention programs that include a system whereby all students learn how to recognize and report bullying related to severe allergy. The school's response to reported bullying should be made clear at the outset and should be fully implemented as planned.

Always be on the look out for signs that a child might be experiencing bullying or teasing because of his or her severe allergy. Potential signs of bullying or teasing include depression, avoidance of social situations, resistance to going to school and poor academic performance.

If you suspect that a child is being bullied, contact the teacher or the principal immediately.

This resource was adapted with permission, from the Food Allergy Research and Education's (FARE) "Managing Food Allergies in the School Setting: Guidance for Parents."

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