

Children and Adolescents with Food Allergies

How Can You Help?



Food allergies are a growing concern for many people and affect about 1 of 25 school-aged children.¹ Among those with food allergies, 1 of 5 will have an allergic reaction while at school. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that has rapid onset and may cause death, and 1 of 4 students who have a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction at school have no previous known food allergy.¹ Schools should have a food allergy management and prevention plan to help support the needs of students with allergies. They should also teach staff members, as well as students and family members, about food allergies. This can create and maintain a healthy, safe, and inclusive educational environment.

What's Happening at School?

Knowing the answers to the following questions can help you support your child's school to address food allergies. If you don't know the answers to these questions, check out the school handbook or school website, attend a school wellness meeting or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, or simply ask your child's teacher.

1. Is there a full-time registered nurse in the school building at all times or a school-based health center to help children with chronic medical conditions or emergencies?
2. How does the school identify and share information about students with food allergies?
3. Is the school aware of the CDC Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs?
4. Is it required that each student with food allergies have an individualized health plan or emergency care plan on file?² Has the child been evaluated for a Section 504 Plan, if appropriate?
5. Are students allowed to carry their medication (such as emergency epinephrine) at school?
6. Does the school or district have stock epinephrine that can be used for any student having a life threatening allergic reaction, and are nurses, teachers, and other staff appropriately trained to administer it?³
7. What are school or district protocols for students suspected of having an allergic reaction at school, on the school bus, on a field trip, or in cases of emergency or lockdown?
8. Are other school staff, such as teachers, bus drivers, and food services staff, trained to recognize and respond to a student who may be having an allergic reaction?
9. What practices are used to safely prepare and serve foods to students with food allergies within the cafeteria, classroom, school parties, and other school events?
10. Is food sharing among students allowed? Is the student with food allergies protected during classroom parties and activities involving food without having to be isolated from the activity?
11. Is there a bullying prevention policy in the school or district that discourages bullying or encourages awareness or anti-stigma of students with medical conditions?





Ideas for Parents

You can be involved in your child's school by **attending** meetings, workshops, or training events offered by the school; **communicating** with school staff and other parents; **volunteering** for school events or in your child's classroom; **reinforcing** healthy messages and practices your child learns at school; **helping** make decisions about health in the school; and **being part** of community activities supported by the school. Here are some specific ideas for how you can support your child's school in addressing food allergies.

- Have an ongoing conversation with your child to discuss their food allergies, their feelings about having food allergies, and if they feel safe and supported at school.⁴
- Work with your child's health care provider to establish a current emergency care plan and for timely completion of required school forms.³ Encourage communication between school health services and your child's health care provider.
- Provide emergency medication to the school nurse or other school health official.
- Ensure that there is a current individualized health care plan, and assist with setting goals.²
- Communicate with your child's teachers, counselors, and school health services staff about your child's food allergies and how they are coping while at school.
- Work with teachers and other staff to identify non-food rewards for your child, thereby reducing exposure to allergens.
- Talk with school nutrition services about your child's allergies and advanced menu viewing.
- Volunteer with your child, or get involved at school health events to educate staff and other families about food allergies. Inquire about the student health education curriculum.
- Join a group, such as the PTA, school wellness committee, or school health advisory council, that addresses the needs of a supportive and healthy school environment.⁵
- Share research-based websites or written materials about food allergies with teachers, nurses, and administrators, when possible, (e.g., <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/index.htm>).



Check out additional resources for parents related to the school nutrition environment and services, physical education and physical activity, and managing chronic health conditions at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/P4HS.htm>.

REFERENCES

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4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors among Youth*. Atlanta: US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2009.
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