

## Why it's important to be Allergy Aware?

Food allergies are on the rise among children in America. There are students in all grades with allergies to different foods. For some of these children, the smallest trace of the allergen—even if not ingested—could cause a severe allergic reaction that may result in death. There are eight foods that are responsible for 90% of food allergies: **Peanuts, Tree nuts, Milk, Eggs, Fish, Shellfish, Soy and Wheat**. Other common allergens are **Insect stings; Medications and Latex**.

Being Allergy Aware means that we strive to keep allergic children protected from reactions and to inform our students and families about how they can participate in the well-being of their classmates with potentially severe allergies.

## Allergies 101

### **Why do allergic reactions happen?**

An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks a normally harmless substance (like a food protein or venom from a bee sting) that comes in contact with the body. This immune response can result in a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. The body may not react upon initial exposure but may produce antibodies with later exposures, which trigger a reaction. The severity and progression of an allergic reaction are unpredictable.

### **What is anaphylaxis?**

Anaphylaxis is a serious, potentially life-threatening allergic response that involves all major body and life organs. This is an emergency. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical treatment, including epinephrine injection and a trip to a hospital emergency room. If anaphylactic shock isn't treated immediately, it can be fatal. Click the link for signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis. <http://www.foodallergy.org/file/common-symptoms-poster.pdf>

### **Avoidance is the only way to prevent a reaction.**

Currently, there is no cure for food allergies. Even trace amounts of an allergen can cause a reaction in some people. Strict avoidance of the food allergen is the only way to prevent a reaction.

### **Avoidance means more than abstaining from certain foods.**

Cross-contamination can occur when someone simply touches an item like a desk, locker, computer mouse, or doorknob after eating foods containing an allergen (such as peanut butter), and leaves behind a residue. If a person with an allergy to that substance comes in contact with that contaminated surface, he/she can suffer a potentially life-threatening reaction. This is why hand-washing is so important. Additionally, cross-contamination can occur within food manufacturing plants, which could affect packaged foods; people with food allergies must always check package labels to make sure items are allergen-free.

## Peer Advocacy

Children with food allergies sometimes struggle to communicate concerns they have about their condition. If we teach compassion and consideration around this issue, children can be terrific advocates for their friends with food allergies. Here are some things kids with food allergies want their peers, and their peers' parents, to know.

- I can't share food with others. When I say "no thank you," I'm not trying to be rude, I'm just keeping myself safe.
- Sometimes I may feel different or left out if I can't eat what everyone else is eating.
- Since I sometimes sit at a special table during lunch period, I often feel lonely and wish my friends would join me.
- If someone at my lunch table has an unsafe food and I don't notice, I am so happy when a friend speaks up and reminds others of my allergy.
- If someone has an unsafe food at my lunch table and I have to tell the lunch aide, I don't want to get anyone in trouble, I just want to be safe.
- If I'm having an allergic reaction, I may need help but might not be able to communicate it well. Please help me by getting the attention of an adult.
- Aside from my food allergies, I am a typical kid just like you!

## How kids can help friends with food allergies

Students can be a good friend to their food allergic classmate by doing the following:

- Ask your friend what they are allergic to.
- Never share or trade food with your allergic friend. What you are eating could contain an ingredient that is harmful to your friend. This is a time when it is okay NOT to offer to share or trade.
- Never touch your allergic friend's food, or their hands, while you're eating together. If traces of a harmful ingredient are on your hands, and then you touch either your friend's food or your friend's hands, you could transfer that allergen and your friend might have a reaction.
- Avoid eating food that contains the ingredients your friend is allergic to when that friend is nearby. Ask your parents to pack snacks and lunches for you that contains safe foods.
- Don't be afraid to remind others of your friend's food allergy. If you notice someone eating a food that your friend is allergic to, remind that person your friend is allergic and they should take that food away.
- Join your friend at the nut-free table in your school's lunchroom. Sometimes, children with food allergies feel left out or different because they can't eat lunch at a table where unsafe foods might be present.
- Wash your hands and face with soap and water after you eat. It is the best way to remove any food that remains on your hands and face. Remember, some kids with food allergies can have a reaction by just touching or breathing in traces of nuts.
- **If a friend who has food allergies suddenly feels sick, get help immediately. Tell an adult right away. An allergic reaction can happen anytime and anywhere. Your quickness can save a life, so don't be shy!**

## What parents of non-allergic kids need to know

Education is vital in order for children to understand what their peers with food allergies face every day.

Parents can help promote allergy awareness and reduce allergic reaction risks in school by educating themselves about this condition and setting a good example for their non-allergic children. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Take food allergies seriously. Food allergies are real medical conditions. Food allergic students need our help to prevent life threatening allergic reactions. Sometimes, a reaction occurs after eating, touching, or breathing in trace amounts of the allergen.
- Talk to your children about food allergies. Explain to your children what allergies are, and that there are certain allergies that can be dangerous. Teach your children to be mindful of other children's allergies when they are eating together. Teach your child not to share or trade food, and to wash their hands with soap and water often while at school.
- Read food labels. Before sending food into school for your child's snack, lunch, or afterschool activities, check to see if the food has peanuts/nuts or other food that your child's friends and classmates are allergic to.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of a food allergic reaction. An allergic reaction can happen very quickly. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of an allergic reaction. Reactions can range from mild (hives) to severe (anaphylaxis).

<http://www.foodallergy.org/file/common-symptoms-poster.pdf>

## Links & References

FARE symptoms of anaphylaxis:

<https://www.foodallergy.org/anaphylaxis>

Tips for avoiding your allergen:

<http://www.foodallergy.org/tips-for-managing-food-allergies>

Croton-Harmon School District Anaphylaxis Guidelines:

[http://www.chufsd.org/Assets/Health\\_and\\_Safety\\_Committee/Croton-Harmon\\_Anaphylaxis\\_Guidelines.pdf?t=635864793061730000](http://www.chufsd.org/Assets/Health_and_Safety_Committee/Croton-Harmon_Anaphylaxis_Guidelines.pdf?t=635864793061730000)

Food Allergy and Research Education Website:

<https://www.foodallergy.org/>

Reading food labels:

<http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm254504.htm>

Links to Croton-Harmon School District Nurses

CET [www.cetschoolnurse.weebly.com](http://www.cetschoolnurse.weebly.com)

PVC [www.pvcschoolnurse.weebly.com](http://www.pvcschoolnurse.weebly.com)

CHHS [www.chhsnurse.weebly.com](http://www.chhsnurse.weebly.com)