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Universal Food Allergy Awareness



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Helping schools become FoodAllergy Smart™

www.foodallergysmart.org

www.allergykids.com

AllergyKids Safe@School™: Back-to-School Guide for Parents

Preparing to send your child with food allergies to school can feel like an overwhelming task. Even for “veteran” parents who have done it all before, the start of a new school year always brings new teachers and new challenges.

I. Getting Started.

- ✓ Talk with other parents of food allergic kids. If you’re new, find out how the school handles students’ food allergies. Compare notes & share tips – don’t reinvent the wheel.
- ✓ In addition to all the medical forms required by the school, prepare with the help of your child’s doctor a “Food Allergy Summary Page”* that includes:
 - 1) the foods your child is allergic to (as well as any other related health issues, such as other allergies or asthma);
 - 2) the possible symptoms of an allergic reaction;
 - 3) the treatment that should be administered and under what circumstances;
 - 4) contact information for the rescue squad (911), your child’s doctor, and you;
 - 5) current picture of your child;
 - 6) doctor’s signature.

**If your school does not have a specific form for this, you can download the AllergyKids “Food Allergy Alert” page: www.allergykids.com/Media/Documents/AKClassroomAlert.pdf*

or

FAAN’s “Food Allergy Action Plan” page: www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf

- ✓ Provide the school with epinephrine auto-injector(s) and any other medications as recommended by your doctor. Make note of the expiration dates.
- ✓ Talk with your child. Reinforce the importance of following all the “food allergy rules” you’ve taught her. Encourage her to talk to you and/or a teacher if she has concerns or questions about how to stay safe at school. Give her a medical alert bracelet.

II. Build a team.

Keeping a child with food allergies safe at school requires the cooperation and vigilance of many people, including teachers, administrators, cafeteria staff, maintenance staff, bus drivers, parents, and other students.

- ✓ Before the first day of school, arrange a meeting with your child's teacher(s), the school nurse, and the head of cafeteria services. If you can also get the principal to attend, all the better. Request that at least an hour be set aside for the meeting, preferably longer.
- ✓ Prior to the meeting, talk with the school nurse to determine whether an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) or a 504 Plan* is recommended.

*For more information, see The Food Allergy Initiative's discussion of 504 Plans: www.foodallergyinitiative.org/section_home.cfm?section_id=8&sub_section_id=3)

- ✓ Make sure you go into the meeting with a list of the topics you'd like to cover. (See the "Safe@School™ Food Allergy Discussion Guide").
- ✓ Don't assume that school staff members are knowledgeable about food allergies. Begin the meeting by asking everyone what they know about food allergies so that you can establish common ground. Use this opportunity to educate them about the basics and to clear up any misconceptions.
- ✓ Hand out copies of your Food Allergy Summary Page and request that each staff member keep it easily accessible for quick reference throughout the year.
- ✓ Take notes during the meeting. If any items are left undecided, make sure you follow-up.
- ✓ Ask the school to send out a letter* to parents letting them know that a student with a severe food allergy is in their child's class. If the school won't do it, send out your own letter. Also, talk to parents at Back-to-School night. Parents can be important allies and are often glad to cooperate once they know the facts and understand the risks.

*sample letter www.foodallergyinitiative.org/uploaded_files/letter%20from%20principal.doc

- ✓ Speak with your child's good friends and encourage your child to do the same. Let them know how they can help their food-allergic friend stay safe.

III. Maintain an open dialogue.

Recognize up front that this is a learning process for everyone involved. Think back to when your child was first diagnosed and how little you probably knew about food allergies. Remember that things that are second-nature to you now, like reading and re-reading ingredient labels, won't be immediately so for others.

The key is frequent, calm, confident communication.

- ✓ Be a frequent visitor at school. Here is an instance where "face time" matters! Volunteer to be the room-parent or to chaperone field trips or to plan the holiday party.
- ✓ Ask to come in and talk about food allergies to your child's class (make sure to check with your child first). Read a story about food allergies or show a video.
- ✓ Make yourself available to parents and staff. Give them your contact information so they can call you with questions/suggestions/or concerns.
- ✓ If no formal written food allergy policy exists, encourage the school to draft one. This is very important so that next year, you will have a solid base to build on and won't be left to always re-invent the wheel.



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AllergyKids Safe@SchoolTM Food Allergy Discussion Guide*

- 1) Food Allergy Basics
 - o What is a food allergy?
 - o What causes an allergic reaction?
 - o What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?
 - o What is the recommended treatment?
- 2) Minimizing the Risk of Allergen Exposure
 - o In the classroom:
 - Snacks
 - Birthday and Holiday Celebrations
 - Science experiments
 - Art projects
 - o In the lunchroom:
 - Seating arrangements
 - School-provided meals (ingredient lists; cross-contamination prevention)
 - Sanitation protocols
 - Hand washing AFTER eating
 - Lunchroom monitors
 - o In enrichment classes (music, PE, art)
 - o During before- and after- school activities
 - o On the bus
 - o On the playground
 - o During special situations:
 - Field trips
 - Substitute teachers, substitute nurse, new personnel
 - School-wide festivals or other celebrations
- 3) Responding to a Food Allergy Medical Emergency
 - o Training and education for staff on how to
 - (1) recognize symptoms of an allergic reaction and
 - (2) respond to a medical emergency
 - o Where will the epi-pen be kept? Who will have access?
 - o What is the emergency protocol? (e.g., who will administer the epi-pen?, who will call the rescue squad?)
 - o Does the emergency protocol need to be adapted to different scenarios? (e.g., what if the allergic reaction occurs on the playground? on a field trip? on the school bus?)

**This guide is not meant to be exhaustive, but only illustrative of the kinds of topics that should be discussed with school personnel.*