



Creating a Safe Classroom for Your Child

Children shouldn't have to worry about food allergies getting in the way of an exciting school year. However, food allergies may affect up to 6% of school-aged children and one in five food-allergic children will have a reaction while at school.

A true food allergy will cause a person's immune system to overreact to an ordinarily harmless food. This is caused by an allergic antibody called IgE (Immunoglobulin E), which is found in people with allergies. Food allergens – those parts of foods that cause allergic reaction – are usually proteins. The most common food allergens, responsible for up to 90% of all allergic reactions are proteins found in:

- Cow's milk
- Peanuts
- Soy
- Shellfish
- Eggs
- Wheat
- Fish
- Tree nuts

The most common symptoms of food allergy are:

- Hives
- Asthma
- Diarrhea
- Eczema
- Vomiting
- Abdominal cramping

The most severe allergic reaction to a food is anaphylaxis – a systemic allergic reaction that can sometimes be fatal. The first signs of anaphylaxis may be a feeling of warmth, flushing, tingling in the mouth or a red, itchy rash. These symptoms can be reversed by treatment with injectable epinephrine, antihistamines and other emergency measures, with follow up care by the Asthma and Allergy Center.

Avoidance and Preparation

Avoiding food allergens is the only way to prevent allergic reactions. Parents are encouraged to take the following steps to protect their food-allergic child:

1. Reinforce to your child the importance of knowing his or her potential food allergy triggers and identifying them to teachers or care providers. If possible, provide your child with a medical bracelet or necklace that identifies his or her specific allergy.
2. Tour your children's school or children facility before school starts and meet with staff to inquire about policies regarding foods brought into the classroom.
3. Provide staff with information and resources to educate them about your child's allergy. Have one of the doctors at the Asthma and Allergy Center provide clear, written instructions on recognizing a reaction and administering medication in case of a reaction. Teach staff when and how to properly administer medications such as injectable epinephrine, encouraging them to handle the medications and ask questions. Explain to them that they cannot delay in administering medication to your child, and that they are obligated to assist your child and to include him or her in normal school activities, according to federal laws.
4. Let staff know that you want to work with them to keep your child healthy and in school, with little or no disruption to peers or the class schedule.

Children, parents and school faculty should also have an emergency action plan for managing food allergies in school. To obtain an emergency action plan, contact the Asthma and Allergy Center.

*Adapted by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology