

Understanding Anaphylaxis in Schools

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For some parents and guardians, sending a child with potentially life-threatening 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 life-threatening allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) can happen at any time or anywhere.

Below are some steps to build this partnership and manage potentially life-threatening 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
- ★ Prepare for field trips and extracurricular activities
- ★ Prevent bullying

Click on the links above for more information on each step.

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, including accessibility to an [Anaphylaxis Action Plan](#) (created by FAAN: www.foodallergy.org/page/food-allergy-action-plan1). 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 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 here: <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 use an epinephrine auto-injector, if one has been prescribed
 - » The importance of informing friends about their life-threatening allergies

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Plan Ahead

Providing information about a child's potentially life-threatening allergies and medications to the school is critical. Prior to the first day of school, a child with life-threatening allergies should have an [Anaphylaxis Action Plan](#) completed by his or her parent or guardian and allergist (or other licensed health care 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 auto-injectors are kept
- ★ Contact information for emergency medical services (i.e., 911), the child's allergist and the parent(s)/guardian(s)
- ★ A current picture of the child
- ★ The signature of the child's allergist (or other licensed health care professional)

Build a Team

Supporting students with potentially life-threatening 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 life-threatening 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 life-threatening 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 potentially life-threatening allergies including the child's anaphylaxis response plan
- ★ Find out what team members already know about life-threatening allergies
- ★ Provide information on the basics (about anaphylaxis), clear up any misconceptions and discuss the role team members have in managing the child's potentially life-threatening allergy
- ★ Ensure school personnel know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction, have access to epinephrine auto-injectors, and know how to use them in the case of anaphylaxis

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 nonfood items for classroom 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
- ★ Keeping “safe snacks” in the classroom for unplanned events, along with safe, nonperishable meals in case lunch is compromised or in the event of a shelter-in-place emergency or evacuation to another location
- ★ Being prepared with “safe snacks” for the entire class so that the child can eat what everyone else does
- ★ 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 that substitute teachers are informed of the child’s life-threatening allergies and are prepared in case of an anaphylactic reaction

Teach Children Self-Management

For children with potentially life-threatening 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 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 life-threatening allergies among others (classmates, friends, etc.)
- ★ 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 (i.e., bees)
- ★ Recognize the symptoms of a life-threatening reaction
- and tell an adult immediately if they suspect an anaphylactic reaction in themselves or a classmate
- ★ Inform friends about their potentially life-threatening allergies, 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 allergy information to emergency medical personnel
- ★ Carry his or her prescribed epinephrine auto-injectors
- ★ Report bullying or teasing so that appropriate action can be taken

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 life-threatening food allergies. Reach out to the school, Board of Education and bus company to find out if these 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 life-threatening allergies on buses/vans. Reach out to the school, Board of Education and bus company to find out if these 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)
- ★ Special seating arrangements
- ★ Equipping the bus driver with a cell phone or emergency radio device
- ★ Training drivers to recognize the symptoms of anaphylaxis and how to respond

Prepare 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 the 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 emergency medications, including epinephrine auto-injectors?
- ★ 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 safe?
- ★ 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 (bus, van, private automobile)?

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Prevent Bullying

The bullying of children with life-threatening allergies must be taken seriously. Children with life-threatening allergies have had severe allergic reactions after being harassed with an actual allergen (i.e., 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 life-threatening allergy. The school's response to reported bullying should be made clear at the outset, should be fully implemented as planned.

Always be on the lookout for signs that a child might be experiencing bullying or teasing because of his or her 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 fact sheet was adopted, with permission, from the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network's (FAAN) "Managing Food Allergies in the School Setting: Guidance for Parents." Download it here: http://www.foodallergy.org/files/FAAN_Parent_FA_Guide.pdf