

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Lunch Room

Discuss these guidelines with the staff at your child's school concerning lunchtime:

- Tables should be thoroughly cleaned after each meal.
- Students should be required to wash their hands before and after eating. Antibacterial gels are not effective in removing food allergens.

### Allergen-Free Tables

Many schools now have designated peanut-free tables. There are many questions surrounding the concept of a peanut-free table, and parents, schools, kids, and even doctors have a variety of different opinions on the subject. Here are several recommendations::

- It is usually a good idea for children to sit at a peanut-free table until they are old enough to make responsible decisions about their peanut allergy, about elementary school age. Up until that age, kids are very likely to share food or sit at a dirty table (that may have peanut residues) without cleaning it.
- Once a child is at a certain age, a peanut-free table may not be necessary. It is important to not make the child feel socially isolated. At this time, it can become your child's decision as to whether or not they want to sit at a peanut-free table. Usually, some precautions, such as wiping the table beforehand, can ensure that your child will be safe during lunch outside of a peanut-free table.

### Field Trips

With proper planning, your child should not have to miss out on field trips because of his/her food allergy. Just keep these tips in mind.

- Make sure that whoever is in charge of your child is well aware of his/her food allergy.
- Your child's medications should be brought along on the field trip and there should be someone on the trip who knows how to recognize an allergic reaction and what to do in the case of an emergency.

### Section 504 Plan

Most schools are accommodating to a child with food allergies. However, if your child's school is not cooperative, keep in mind that under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination in an educational program or institution on the basis of a disability, a school must make accommodations so your child can safely participate in all school activities. More information about Section 504 Plans can be found on the Office of Civil Rights website at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/>.



### FOOD ALLERGY PROGRAM

The Food Allergy Program at Children's National Medical Center provides comprehensive services in the evaluation and management of a wide variety of food allergies, including IgE-mediated food allergy, gastrointestinal food allergy, and eosinophilic gastrointestinal disorders.

Food Allergy Program  
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### RESOURCES

For more detailed information about food allergies, visit:

- The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network ([www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org))
- The Food Allergy Initiative ([www.faiusa.org](http://www.faiusa.org))

[www.childrensnational.org](http://www.childrensnational.org)

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ALLERGENS & SCHOOL



## STARTING SCHOOL

Parents are always nervous about sending their kids off to school for the first time. For the parent of a child with food allergies, sending a child to school brings up some additional concerns. One thing to remember is your child is not alone. There are approximately 2 million school-age children with food allergies. Many schools now have anaphylaxis and food allergy policies already in place, and there is a lot that you can do to create a safe environment for your child.

## INDIVIDUALIZED FOOD ALLERGY ACTION PLAN

An individualized health care plan should include:

- Your child's food allergy emergency action plan, which has a list of symptoms associated with an allergic reaction, a treatment plan in the case of an allergic reaction, and emergency contact information. It is very important to make sure that anyone who works closely with your child knows the symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction and is prepared to deal with an emergency should your child have a reaction.
- Basic rules to prevent exposure to problem foods.
- A list of your child's medications, where they are stored (in a convenient location), and instructions on how to use the medications. Some schools allow students to carry their own medications. This may be the best option for older students as long as they are able to administer their medications.

Your child's school should have a copy of this plan, which should be shared with every staff member who interacts with your child.



## DAY CARE AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

It is important to educate your child's caregivers about food allergies. Preschoolers require extra vigilance because they have little understanding of their food allergy and cannot advocate for themselves. These topics should be covered with the school or daycare's nurse, administrators, teachers, and anyone else involved in the care of your child:

### *Your child's food allergy*

It is very important to educate the daycare or preschool about your child's allergy. Make sure the school staff understand the severity of your child's allergy and how important it is for your child to avoid ingestion or contact with the food allergen.

- Provide a list of what foods must be avoided.
- Provide a list of "safe foods" that your child can eat and emphasize that your child only eat foods on that list.
- Stress to the school that they must watch your child carefully during snack and lunch time. For example, if a child is eating cheese, it is important to make sure that child doesn't then touch a child with a milk allergy because this can trigger an allergic reaction.
- Educate the staff about cross-contamination. Give examples, such as, if they are cutting something with peanut butter with a knife and then use that same knife to serve your child his/her "safe" snack, the small amount of peanut on the knife can cause an allergic reaction.
- Children at the preschool age love to put everything in their mouths and have a tendency to share food at snack or lunchtime. Staff should ensure that children are not sharing food and for instance, a child with tree nut allergy doesn't accidentally try his neighbor's pecan cookie.

### *Important Precautions*

Ask your daycare or preschool to take these precautions to keep your child safe:

- Wash all surfaces with soap and water after mealtime.
- Create a rule that all children wash their hands with soap and water before and after eating. This is to prevent the spread of a food allergen to places outside of the eating area. Also keep in mind that antibacterial gel is not sufficient to get rid of food allergens.

### *What to do if there is a reaction*

- Discuss with your child's caregivers how to recognize an anaphylactic reaction. Ensure that everyone involved in your child's care knows how to recognize a reaction and what to do in the event of a reaction.
- Make sure all emergency medications, including two epinephrine autoinjectors, are at the school and stored in a safe, convenient location. Train people at the school to use the epinephrine autoinjector.
- Go over an emergency action plan. Make sure that anyone involved in your child's care is prepared to deal with an anaphylactic reaction. They must know how to recognize a reaction, how to administer epinephrine, and to call 911 if your child has a reaction.

## ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL

Usually around elementary school, children start to develop an understanding of their food allergies. However, it is still important to educate your child's caregivers about his/her food allergy and what to do in the case of an anaphylactic reaction. By middle and high school, children can oftentimes advocate for themselves, know what foods to avoid, and understand how to recognize an anaphylactic reaction.

Regardless of how old your child is, the school should have an individualized food allergy action plan. You should meet with the school staff to discuss and modify food allergy policies and develop one if there is not already one in place. These are key topics you should discuss:

- **Your child's food allergy:** It is very important to educate your child's caregivers – school nurses, teachers, cafeteria staff, etc – as to what a food allergy is. They should understand what your child is allergic to, how to prevent accidental exposure, and what to do in an emergency.
- **"Food-free" or at least an "allergen-free" classroom.** This is not necessary, but it can make your child's life easier and can lower the chances of your child having an accidental exposure to the food allergen. If this is not an option, designate a list of "safe foods" or bring in some safe snacks for your child for snack time or class parties.
- **Lunch room policies (see next panel).** Make sure to talk to the staff about the importance of thoroughly cleaning the tables following meals. Explain that it can only take a trace amount of the food allergen to trigger an allergic reaction.
- **Food allergy policy:** The older your child gets, the more they can advocate for themselves. However, it is still important for the school to have a food allergy policy and to ensure that the school is prepared to accommodate for your child's food allergy and to deal with an allergic reaction.

