



safe@schoolTM partners

Helping Schools become FoodAllergy SmartTM

www.foodallergysmart.org

Safe@SchoolTM with Food Allergies: 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. Do your homework.

- ✓ 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 one-page “Emergency Action Plan*.” This document should include:
 - 1) the foods your child is allergic to;
 - 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 “Food Allergy Action Plan,” you can download one: FAAN’s “Food Allergy Action Plan” page: www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf or AllergyKids “Food Allergy Alert” page: www.allergykids.com/Media/Documents/AKClassroomAlert.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™ Partner download “Food Allergy School 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 Action Plan 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. The purpose of this letter does not necessarily have to be to ban certain foods from the classroom. Another approach is simply to include a request that “when your family's nutritional choices permit an alternative to peanut butter, you refrain from bringing peanut products into the classroom.” 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

- ✓ If your child is comfortable with the idea, 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. 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 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.

safe@school™ partners offers:

- (1) in-service food allergy safety training for schools, camps and daycares;
- (2) guidance in drafting written food allergy policies;
- (3) informational sessions on food allergies for parents and other key members of the school community.

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