



My Child's Classmate has a Food Allergy: What should I know?

1. Food allergies are a growing health concern in schools across the country.

1 in 25 kids under 18 in this country suffer from food allergies. Experts agree this population is growing exponentially. The incidence of the peanut allergy alone fully doubled in the five-year period from 1997-2002.

2. Food allergic reactions can be fatal.

A food allergy is an overreaction of the immune system that can affect any system of the body (respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and skin). Ingestion of the allergenic food protein triggers this overreaction and causes a variety of symptoms ranging from nausea to anaphylaxis (a potentially fatal systemic allergic reaction).

The severity of an allergic reaction is unpredictable: a seemingly mild reaction can become life-threatening within minutes. Early recognition of symptoms and prompt administration of epinephrine are critical to survival.

Each year, food allergies are the cause of approximately 200 deaths and over 30,000 emergency room visits. Kids have died in schools from food-induced anaphylaxis.

3. There is no cure for food allergies.

Strict avoidance of the allergenic food is the only way to prevent anaphylaxis.

4. Ingestion of even trace amounts of the allergen can cause anaphylaxis.

5. Kids can introduce a food allergen into their bodies not only via mouth, but also via eyes or nose by inadvertently touching these areas of the face with hands that have come into contact with the food allergen.

A child need not eat a food allergen to experience an allergic reaction. Rubbing eyes or putting a finger in the nose after touching a surface contaminated with the allergenic food is enough to potentially trigger an allergic reaction.

****How can I help?***

- (A) Respect school rules regarding permissible foods.
- (B) Carefully read ingredient and manufacturing labels.
- (C) For food to be shared by the class, bring in only store-bought food with a list of ingredients that are safe for all members of the class to eat.
- (D) Wash your child's hands/mouth before school if s/he has eaten a known food allergen.
- (E) If necessary, talk to your child about the seriousness of food allergies and the harm caused by teasing.
- (F) Don't hesitate to contact school personnel with any questions or concerns.