

Education of School Staff

School nurses, staff, students, parents and guardians need to be able to point to material and resources that are based on evidence. All school staff, particularly those responsible for students with severe allergies, should receive allergy education that is evidence-based. It should be emphasized that no two reactions are alike – students experience different reactions and even individual reactions will vary from one episode to the next.

School staff should receive education on the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction and be taught how to respond if it's an emergency.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests the following (these can be applied to all types of allergies):

- How to respond to an allergy emergency.
- Information about federal laws that could apply, such as the ADA, Section 504, and FERPA. Information about any state laws, including regulations, or district policies that apply.
- How to administer epinephrine with an auto-injector (for those formally delegated to do so).
- How to help children treat their own allergy episodes.
- Effects of food allergies on children's behavior and ability to learn.
- Importance of giving emotional support to children with food allergies and to other children who might witness a severe food allergy reaction (anaphylaxis).
- Common risk factors, triggers, and areas of exposure to food allergens in schools.
- Specific strategies for fully integrating children with allergies into school and class activities while reducing the risk of exposure to allergens in classrooms, during meals, during nonacademic outings, on field trips, during official activities before and after school programs, and during events sponsored by schools programs that are held outside of regular hours. These strategies could address (but are not limited to) the following:
 - o Special seating arrangements when age and circumstance appropriate (e.g., during meal times, birthday parties).
 - o Plans for keeping foods with allergens separated from foods provided to children with food allergies.
 - o Rules on how staff and students should wash their hands and clean surfaces to reduce the risk of exposure to food allergens.
 - o The importance of not sharing food.
 - o How to read food labels to identify food allergens.
 - o Any food in the classroom should have ingredients listed on a label; no home-baked treats. Twenty-five percent of first-time allergic reactions occur in the school setting.

Special Note: It is imperative that the school nurse helps staff understand the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act law, or FERPA. Information can only be shared on a need-to-know basis and children have the right to have their health information protected. Remind staff that health-related conversations should occur in private – not in school hallways or public areas.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2013). Voluntary guidelines for managing food allergies in schools and early care and education programs. Washington DC: US Department of Health and Human Services.

✓ Practical Points

Education of school staff can be held at a school-wide faculty meeting to teach signs and symptoms of allergies and generalized allergy care.

Specific, individualized instruction should be provided to staff supervising a student with a known allergy who is at risk for anaphylaxis.