



# MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES IN SCHOOLS

## The Role of School District Superintendents



### OVERVIEW

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*, (<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies>) to help schools manage the risk of food allergies and severe allergic reactions in students. The guidelines can help schools manage the risk of food allergies and severe allergic reactions in students. Managing food allergies can be accomplished through a partnership among families, health care providers, and schools. As a school district superintendent, you provide the leadership necessary to ensure that comprehensive district plans are in place for protecting students with food allergies and for responding to food allergy emergencies.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ A food allergy is an adverse immune system reaction that occurs soon after exposure to a certain food.
- ▶ Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death. The recommended first line treatment for anaphylaxis is the prompt use of epinephrine and activating the emergency medical system (EMS/911).
- ▶ About 8% of students are likely to be affected by food allergies, and for reasons that are not completely understood, the number of children with food allergies is increasing.<sup>1,2</sup>
- ▶ Food allergy reactions can be unpredictable. 1 of 4 students who have a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction at school have no previous known food allergy.<sup>4,5</sup>



**About 20% of students with food allergies (1 of 5) will have a reaction while at school.<sup>3</sup>**



**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Division of Population Health



## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### ✓ Lead your school district's coordinated planning for managing food allergies.

- ▶ Provide leadership, and work collaboratively with the school board to designate resources to develop and implement a comprehensive set of school district policies to manage food allergies in schools.
- ▶ Be familiar with federal and state laws relevant to managing food allergies, and make sure policies and practices align with these laws.
- ▶ Communicate school district policies and the district's plan for managing food allergies in schools to all school staff, substitute teachers, classroom volunteers, students, and parents, including information for procedures to address concerns or disagreements with the food allergy policies and plans.
- ▶ Regularly review and evaluate school district food allergy policies, and revise, as needed.

### ✓ Support professional development on food allergies for school staff.

- ▶ Support and allocate resources and time for professional development and training on food allergies.
- ▶ Make sure that district staff is adequately trained, competent, and confident to perform assigned responsibilities to help students with food allergies and respond to food allergy emergencies.
- ▶ Training should include general food allergy information provided for all staff, in-depth training for staff with frequent contact with children with food allergies, and specialized training for staff who will manage food allergies daily, including response to allergy emergencies and the administration of emergency epinephrine auto-injectors.

### ✓ Prepare your school district to be ready to respond to food allergy emergencies.

- ▶ Ensure that the response to life-threatening food allergy reactions is a part of your school district's emergency planning.
- ▶ Make sure that each school has trained and appropriately certified or licensed staff to implement emergency care plans for students, 504 plans, and IEPs, as necessary.
- ▶ Encourage periodic school emergency response drills to practice responding to food allergy emergencies.

### ✓ Take the lead on creating and maintaining healthy school environments. .

- ▶ Establish food allergy policies and practices that address competitive foods, such as those available in vending machines or school stores, at fundraisers or athletic events, and during class parties, or after-school programs. Allergen information should be available to student, staff, and parents for all food served to students during the school day and at after-school events and programs.
- ▶ Consistently enforce policies that prohibit discrimination and bullying against all students, including those with food allergies.
- ▶ Collaborate with school board members, school administrators, and other school staff to create a safe and inclusive environment for students with food allergies by ensuring that food allergy policies and practices are followed throughout the school district.



## KNOW YOUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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- ▶ These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability:
  - **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** — students with disabilities are entitled to free and appropriate education (FAPE).
  - **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.**
  - **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** — a student could be found eligible for services under IDEA Part B because of a food allergy only if it adversely affects the child’s educational performance, and the child needs special education and related services because of the food allergy.
- ▶ **The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act 2 USC 1758(a)** — governs meal accommodations for students with food related disabilities.
- ▶ **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974** — governs the confidentiality of educational records.
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with your own state and district laws and policies.
- ▶ Learn more about federal laws and other legal regulations on pages 92–95 of the *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*.



## RESOURCES

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**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. 2013. Available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies>

**Food Allergy Resource and Education (FARE)** <http://www.foodallergy.org/>

**National Association of School Nurse (NASN), Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Tool Kit.** Available at <https://www.nasn.org/nasn/nasn-resources/practice-topics/allergies-anaphylaxis>



## REFERENCES

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2. Tang ML, Mullins RJ. Food Allergy: is prevalence increasing? *Intern Med J*. 2017;47(3):256–261pmid:28260260
3. Nowak-Wegrzyn A, Conover-Walker MK, Wood RA. Food-allergic reactions in schools and preschools. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2001;155(7):790-795.
4. McIntyre CL, Sheetz AH, Carroll CR, Young MC. Administration of epinephrine for life-threatening allergic reactions in school settings. *Pediatrics*. 2005;116(5):1134-1140.
5. Sicherer SH, Furlong TJ, DeSimone J, Sampson HA. The US Peanut and Tree Nut Allergy Registry: characteristics of reactions in schools and day care. *J Pediatr*. 2001;138(4):560-565.