

Supplement B: Care for Children With Food Allergies

ALLERGY!

Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Some children in your care may have food allergies, so it is important to be aware of the ingredients in all foods before serving. Watch children carefully when serving foods that may cause an allergic reaction.

- Food allergy symptoms usually develop within a few minutes to a few hours after eating the offending food. Food allergies can even occur the first time a food is eaten.
- No medication can be taken to prevent food allergies. The only way to prevent an allergic reaction is to strictly avoid the food that can cause a reaction. Epinephrine, a medication prescribed by a doctor, is used to control symptoms of an allergic reaction after they occur.
- Emergency treatment is critical for someone having a severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis.* Contact emergency medical services, or call 911, if a child is having a severe allergic reaction. If untreated, anaphylaxis can cause coma or death.
- A written care plan, signed by the child's doctor, should be in place so child care providers know what steps to follow if there is an allergic reaction.



*** Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that happens quickly and may cause death. It may cause a child to stop breathing or experience a dangerous drop in blood pressure. If a child is having an anaphylactic reaction, administer epinephrine as soon as possible to improve the child's chances of survival and quick recovery.**

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is a reaction of the body's immune system to a protein in a food called an allergen.* Food allergies can be serious, life-threatening conditions and should be diagnosed by a licensed physician or board-certified allergist. Symptoms of a food allergic reaction may include a skin rash; hives; itchy, watery eyes; swelling of lips, tongue, and throat; itching in the mouth or throat; nausea; vomiting; diarrhea; difficulty breathing; or loss of consciousness.

*** A food allergen is a substance in food that may cause an allergic reaction in some people.**

What are the most common foods that might cause an allergic reaction?

More than 170 foods are known to cause an allergic reaction in some people. There are eight foods that most commonly trigger an allergic reaction. These foods, and any ingredients made from them, are known as "the top eight allergens" and should be identified as allergens on food labels. These foods include:

- ▶ **Cow's Milk** – Anything made from cow's milk, such as yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, ice cream, pudding, custard, butter, margarine, cream, sour cream, cream cheese, artificial butter flavor, buttermilk, evaporated milk, nonfat dry milk, nondairy whipped topping, lactose-free milk, and milk-based formulas. Goat's milk should also be avoided if someone is allergic to cow's milk. Ingredients made from cow's milk include whey, casein, and caseinates.
- ▶ **Eggs** – Anything made from egg whites, yolks, powdered eggs, dried eggs, egg solids, egg substitutes, meringue, or lecithin. Many foods can have eggs in them—like baked foods, soups, and mayonnaise. Foods that may contain egg ingredients include marshmallows, surimi, pasta, and noodles.

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- ▶ **Peanuts** – Peanuts, peanut butter, peanut flour, and hydrolyzed protein. Peanuts are sometimes found in baked goods, tree nuts, chili, egg rolls, enchilada sauce, mole sauce, and candy. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file to determine if peanut oil also needs to be avoided.
- ▶ **Tree nuts** – Include, but are not limited to, walnuts, almonds, pecans, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios, Brazil nuts, nut butters, and nut oils. Tree nuts are sometimes found in baked goods, peanuts, and candy. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file to determine if coconuts or coconut oil also need to be avoided.
- ▶ **Fish** – Fish sticks, salmon, tuna, cod, tilapia, pollock, halibut, fish sauce, fish paste, and fish broth are some examples. Foods that may contain fish ingredients include Caesar salad dressing, Worcestershire sauce, barbeque sauce, bouillabaisse, imitation fish or shellfish, and surimi.
- ▶ **Shellfish** – Crab, lobster, crawfish, prawns, and shrimp are some examples. Mollusks, such as clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, and squid, are not required to be listed specifically on a food label. Ingredients made from shellfish may include surimi, fish stock, fish sauce, and seafood flavoring.
- ▶ **Soy** – Anything made from soybeans, soy protein, and soy flour. Foods commonly made from soy or that may contain soy ingredients include tofu, edamame, soy nuts, soy nut butter, textured vegetable protein, soy milk, soy yogurt, soy ice cream, and soy sauce. Soy can also be found in processed chicken and meat products. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file to determine if soybean oil or soy lecithin also needs to be avoided.
- ▶ **Wheat** – Anything made from wheat, such as bread, pasta, cereal, crackers, flour, semolina, durum, and couscous. Wheat is sometimes found in spaghetti sauce, cheese sauce, gravy, lunch meats, processed meats, surimi, imitation crabmeat, starch, and soy sauce.

Many of the foods that have the top eight food allergens are good sources of vitamins and minerals, and should be served only to children without allergies to those foods.

While these eight allergens are the most common, a child may have a severe, life-threatening allergy to a different food. A child may be allergic to more than one food. Cross-contamination from any of these allergens on cooking surfaces, utensils, or cooking equipment can also trigger an allergic reaction in someone who has food allergies. For ideas on safer alternatives to allergenic foods, see the Additional Resources on page 99, or contact your State agency or sponsoring organization.

What are some nonfood items that might trigger an allergic reaction?

Food allergens can be found in nonfood items too. If you care for a child with a food allergy, you should avoid using food and nonfood items that contain allergens in your program activities, arts and crafts projects, counting exercises, or cooking activities. Read labels carefully or contact the manufacturer to determine if food and nonfood items contain allergens. Find alternatives to nonfood items that contain allergens and use the safer versions instead. Food allergens can be found in these items:

- ▶ **Soaps** (may contain milk, wheat, soy, or nut extracts)
- ▶ **Dried pasta** (contains wheat and may contain egg)



- ▶ **Crayons** (may contain soy)
- ▶ **Finger paints** (may contain milk or egg whites)
- ▶ **Modeling clay** (may contain wheat)

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Is it a food allergy or a food intolerance?

Other food reactions or sensitivities to foods are known as **food intolerances**. Food allergy is sometimes confused with food intolerance. Food intolerances are often temporary and rarely life-threatening. Food allergies can cause severe, life-threatening reactions. It is important that food allergies and food intolerances are diagnosed by a doctor.

- ▶ **The most common food intolerance is lactose intolerance**—a reaction that involves the digestive system. If a child who is lactose intolerant drinks milk or eats food made from milk, he or she may experience gas, bloating, and uncomfortable stomach pain.
- ▶ **Gluten intolerance, also known as Celiac disease or “celiac sprue,”** is another food intolerance that may involve the digestive system. Gluten is a part of wheat, barley, and rye. If a gluten-intolerant child eats foods containing gluten, he or she may experience bloating and gas, diarrhea, constipation, headaches, itchy skin rash, and even mouth sores.



What should I do if a child has a food allergy or food intolerance?

Children could have their first allergic reaction while in your care, so you must be prepared to react quickly and effectively. Everyone involved in planning, preparing, and serving food should be extremely aware of food allergy risks and be prepared. Trained providers, proper documentation, clear communication with families, and careful planning for the possibility of an emergency, will ensure a safe environment for children with food allergies.

- ▶ **Participate in a food allergy training** conducted by a child care health consultant, a health care provider, or other qualified child care trainer with expertise in young children's health and food allergies.
 - Food allergy training is recommended for all child care providers, even if a program has no enrolled children with known food allergies.
 - Training topics should include information about preventing exposure to specific food allergens, recognizing the symptoms of allergic reactions, and responding to allergic reactions.
 - Contact your State agency or sponsoring organization for more information or for assistance in finding or arranging a training session.
 - Invite the parents of children with food allergies to be involved in the training or education. They can share their knowledge about their experiences with food allergies.
- ▶ **Inform all child care providers, including substitutes,** about the children in your care who have food allergies.
- ▶ **Talk to the child's parents or guardians about the child's food allergies or food intolerances.** Learn about the child's care plan, as well as what the child knows about what he or she can and cannot eat. The child may not be able to tell the child care provider when he or she is having an allergic reaction to food, so it is important to know the possible symptoms of a reaction.

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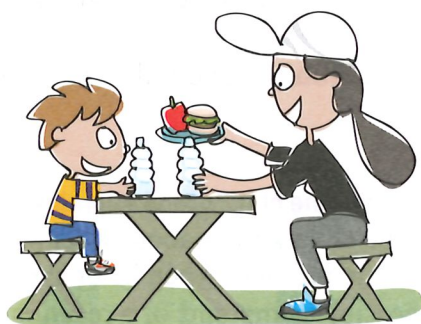
- ▶ **Know where emergency medications, such as epinephrine,** are stored and how they should be used in case a child has an allergic reaction while in your care. More than one person should be trained on how to use epinephrine.
- ▶ **Be aware of what is in foods before serving.** Read all food ingredient lists and labels, and check food allergen content statements on packages. Food companies are required to identify the top eight food allergens in products by either: 1) listing allergens in bold type on the ingredient list, or 2) listing the allergens immediately following the ingredient list. If a food product contains any of the top eight allergens, it should have a “Contains” statement on the label. For example, “Contains wheat, milk, and soy ingredients.”

Ingredients:

Whole-wheat flour,
water, sugar, soybean
oil, whey (milk),
eggs, vanilla, natural
and artificial flavoring,
salt, leavening.

Contains Wheat, Milk, Eggs, and Soy

- Although companies are required to identify the top eight food allergens in products, they may not always do so. Be sure to read the ingredient list carefully.
 - Some labels may include a statement about being produced on the “same equipment as” or “made in the same facility as” products that contain the specific allergen the child is allergic to—those food products should also be avoided. For example, “Made on the same equipment as products containing peanuts.” It is important to know that food companies are not required to have these statements on their label.
 - Some food companies may list allergens other than the top eight, but they are not required to do so.
- ▶ **Always actively supervise children while they are eating.** Discourage food sharing among children. Pay particular attention during special events such as picnics, field trips, or parties.
 - ▶ **Follow the regular menu whenever possible.** Provide menus to parents and caregivers. If children in your care have food allergies or intolerances, make sure the menu highlights foods that may cause a reaction in their child.



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How can children tell the care provider that they are having an allergic reaction?

- ▶ **If having an allergic reaction, a child may try to tell you in his or her own words.** If you hear phrases such as these, the child may be trying to describe that he or she is having an allergic reaction.

"This food is too spicy."

"My tongue is hot."

"My tongue feels like there is hair on it."

"There's a frog in my throat."

"My lips feel tight."

"My mouth feels funny."

"My mouth itches."

"It feels like something is stuck in my throat."

"It feels like there are bugs in my ear."

"It feels like there is a bump in the back of my throat."

- ▶ **A child may not always be able to tell you in words that he or she is having an allergic reaction.** If you see the child doing some of these behaviors, he or she may be having an allergic reaction.

- If a child is pulling or scratching at his or her tongue, he or she may be having an allergic reaction.
- Some children's voices may become hoarse or squeaky if they are having an allergic reaction.
- The child's words may become slurred if his or her mouth is beginning to swell from an allergic reaction.

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How do I reduce the risk of children in my care with either food allergies or food intolerances from having a reaction to food?

Cross-contamination occurs when an allergen is accidentally transferred from one food or surface to another. This transfer may occur from food to food, from hands to food, from kitchen equipment to food, or from a food contact surface to hands or food. Cross-contamination can be prevented through handwashing, cleaning, and proper food handling and storage. Take these steps to reduce the risk of a child having a reaction to food.

Clean

- ▶ **Wash your hands before and after preparing and serving foods** for the food-allergic child. Soap should be used, not antibacterial gel sanitizers.
- ▶ **Make sure all children wash their hands before and after they eat** so they do not spread food allergens to other areas. The children's faces may need to be wiped clean as well.
- ▶ **Wipe down counters and tables** with common household cleaners *before* and *after* meals and snacks.
- ▶ **Mop up spills properly** to prevent spreading the allergen to other surfaces.
- ▶ **Thoroughly clean handwashing sinks including faucets.** Food allergens, which the food-allergic child should not come into contact with, may get on the sink from dirty hands or discarded foods.
- ▶ **Establish a regular cleaning routine.** Children can be encouraged to clean-up after themselves and throw away trash, but you should make sure that surfaces and handwashing sinks are cleaned properly.



Avoid Cross-Contamination

- ▶ **Organize kitchen space** to keep foods for food-allergic children separate from other foods. For example, label pantry and refrigerator shelves that hold foods that are "safe" for the child. Then, let others know how the kitchen is organized or post information in the pantry.
- ▶ **Prepare foods for the food allergic child first** to prevent spreading food allergens from one surface or utensil to another. Label the foods, and keep them separate from other foods.
- ▶ **Be careful to use separate utensils** when preparing and serving food to the food-allergic child. Cross-contamination from food allergens on cooking surfaces, utensils, or cooking equipment can trigger an allergic reaction in a child who has food allergies.

