

Managing Food Allergies in School: What Educators Need to Know

If your district has not yet implemented a food allergy policy and management plan, it's time you did.

By Eleanor Garrow

An estimated 2.2 million school-age children in the United States have food allergies, and that number seems to be on the rise. What's more, survey studies indicate that one out of six kids with food allergies will have an allergic reaction while in school and that 25% of these reactions will be first-time reactions.

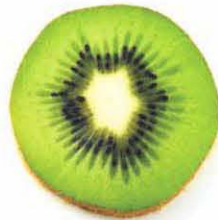
If your district has not yet implemented a food allergy policy and management plan, it's time you did.

Regardless of whether you are managing food allergies in school for the first time, are a seasoned pro, are looking to strengthen an existing management plan, or want

guidance to creating a new one, the following steps are key to your food allergy plan's success. These steps are focused at the school-level but require the support of district leaders to be effective.

Prepare in advance.

Meet with parents of students with food allergies before the start of the school year. This meeting should include the school nurse, principal, teacher(s), and food service director to discuss the specific food allergies and how they will be managed in the school setting.



The Need for School Food Allergy Training

As the number of children with food allergies continues to rise, training for teachers and staff on food allergy safety has never been more critical. The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) School Food Allergy Program (SFAP) is a multimedia program that includes two key components: the *Safe@School*® training presentation for educators and the *Comprehensive Guide*, a collection of resource materials for administrators, school nurses, teachers, food service staff, parents, and other school personnel.



Safe@School® Training for Educators is an inservice presentation conducted by FAAN expert staff for schools, camps, and childcare programs that prepares educators to confidently **CARE**™ for students with life-threatening food allergies by teaching them how to

Comprehend the six key food allergy medical facts.

Avoid the food allergen. Practical techniques on how to manage the classroom, lunchroom, field trips, and more.

Recognize an allergic reaction. A review of all the potential symptoms, from the classic symptoms to the lesser recognized symptoms.

Enact emergency protocol. Information about how to administer an epinephrine auto-injector and exactly what to say when calling emergency responders.

In addition to an inservice training, school districts also receive the *Safe@School* materials on a CD to help district personnel conduct the training themselves in subsequent years.

The Comprehensive Guide is a binder of literature for all school personnel, standardized forms, *Students with Food Allergies: The Laws* booklet, and posters and brochures.

Ask parents to provide a list of accommodations that they believe are reasonable, such as allergy-friendly tables in the cafeteria and a no-food policy in the classrooms. Cooperate to develop a plan that will work for the student and for the school.

Reassure the parents and students that the school staff will help minimize the risks of an allergic reaction, and that the staff will be trained to recognize symptoms and treat a reaction if necessary.

Share written information.

Schools and districts should have as much information as possible to help customize a food allergy management plan for the student. Ask parents for a one-page summary of their children's allergies, the severity of their reactions, and a Food Allergy Action Plan (FAAP), signed by a doctor, that provides information on how to recognize and treat an allergic reaction. (A FAAP is available for download from www.foodallergy.org in English and Spanish.)

Every school staff member who comes into contact with the student with food allergies throughout the day must have a copy of the student's FAAP, know the student's food allergies, and be trained in how to administer epinephrine in case of an allergic reaction.

Provide parents with written information outlining school or district policies regarding food allergy, medication storage and administration, and any available resources, such as a student advocate or delegate.

Build a team.

Build a strong and communicative team to manage students' food allergies. The team should consist of the parents, the school nurse, administrators, food service providers, teaching staff, coaches and activity directors, and the bus driver. Having all these people on the same page helps create a much stronger safety net for the students.

This team should review information about how to avoid food allergens, how to immediately treat an allergic reaction, and any specifics of a student's FAAP, Individual Health Plan, or 504 Plan. Be sure all team members are clear on their responsibilities and the role they play in each student's food allergy management plan.

Minimize risk.

In partnership with members of the food allergy team, perform a food allergy risk assessment of each school. Look at areas such as the classroom, cafeteria, art room, science labs, special events, sports field, gymnasiums, and field trips, and identify solutions to potential risks.

Work on ways to reduce exposure to food allergens in the school. For example, consider making classrooms food-free, implement procedures to ensure lunchroom tables are washed before and after each use, ensure students and staff wash their hands with soap and water before and after eating, read all product labels carefully, implement a "no food sharing" policy, and look to non-food items or activities as rewards.

Implement staff training.

All staff members should be trained in all aspects of food allergy management. This includes knowing which foods



The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Management Act (Section 112 of the Food Safety Modernization Act)

Five years after the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Management Act (FAAMA) was introduced in the U.S. Congress, it was signed into law by President Obama on January 4, 2011.

FAAN led the effort to encourage Congress to enact the FAAMA, which calls for voluntary national guidelines to help schools manage students affected by food allergy and anaphylaxis.

The importance of managing life-threatening food allergies in the school setting has been recognized by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology; the American Academy of Pediatrics; American Medical Association; and the National Association of School Nurses.

Currently, there are no consistent, standardized guidelines to help schools safely manage students with the disease.

This bill

- Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and make available to local educational agencies a *voluntary policy* to manage the risk of food allergy and anaphylaxis in schools;
- Directs that such policy address: (1) a parental obligation to provide the school with information regarding a student's food allergy and anaphylaxis; (2) communication strategies between schools and emergency medical services; (3) strategies to reduce the risk of exposure in classrooms and common areas; (4) food allergy management training of school personnel; (5) authorization of school personnel to administer epinephrine when the school nurse is not immediately available; and (6) creation of an individual health care plan tailored to each child's risk for anaphylaxis; and
- Provides for school-based food allergy management incentive grants to local educational agencies to assist such agencies with adoption and implementation of food allergy management guidelines in public K-12 schools.

School Resources from FAAN

Free school resources available on FAAN's Website (www.foodallergy.org) include:

- Downloadable presentations.
- Downloadable Food Allergy Action Plan.
- Articles focusing on food allergy management in schools.
- Brochures and posters to increase food allergy awareness.
- Guidelines for managing food allergies in schools.
- A Back-to-School Toolkit, which includes resources to assist in food allergy management in the classroom.
- Information about state guidelines for schools.

a student should avoid, reading food labels, recognizing symptoms of a reaction, and understanding how to follow a student's FAAP in the event of an allergic reaction. All staff members should know where medication is located and how to use an epinephrine auto-injector. Be sure substitute teachers, assistants, and chaperones are given the appropriate training as well.

Plan follow-up meetings.

Communication between parents and school staff must be ongoing. Throughout the school year, perhaps once a quarter or once a semester, parents and school staff should meet to discuss how the food allergy management plan is going. All team members of the team should be informed of any changes to the plan.

This is also a great time to review the students' FAAP and to check the expiration date of medications that are kept at school. Also take the time to review the school and class calendars to identify special events that need detailed planning to accommodate students with food allergies.

Each year, thousands of children who have food allergies attend school without incident, thanks in part to effective communication between parents and school staff.

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Plan to attend Eleanor's session at the ASBO Annual Meeting and Expo in Seattle, Washington, September 16-19, 2011.