

Food Allergy FAQs

1. What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is an abnormal response to a food, triggered by the body's immune system. In individuals with food allergies, the immune system mistakenly responds to a food (known as the food allergen) as if it were harmful, triggering a variety of negative health effects.

2. What is the difference between food allergy and food intolerance?

Food allergies and food intolerances (or sensitivities) can have similar symptoms, but are very different conditions.

- Intolerances, such as lactose intolerance and celiac disease, can cause someone to feel ill.
- Food allergies can not only make someone feel ill, but can also cause a life-threatening reaction (called anaphylaxis).

3. What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is defined as a serious allergic or hypersensitivity reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death by threatening breathing and blood circulation. Symptoms may include difficulty breathing, low blood pressure (pale, loss of consciousness, weak pulse), skin symptoms, swollen lips, or gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, cramping).

4. What paperwork needs to be completed for a child with food allergies?

Parents of children with food allergies should complete the *Physician Order/Severe Allergy Action Plan* and *Screening Questionnaire for Severe Allergies* and provide these to the public health nurse (PHN) at their school.

5. Where will my child's auto-injectors and medications be kept?

Medication is stored in an unlocked cabinet in the school health clinic, unless other arrangements have been made.

6. Why is it important that children be taught not to share food with their friends?

To prevent possible exposure to a food allergen.

7. May a student carry his/her own auto-injector?

Students may be permitted to carry and self-administer epinephrine if written authorization is obtained from the parent and physician, and provided to the public health nurse (PHN).

8. Will my child have the option of a nut-free classroom? Can my child be placed in a class with other students with food allergies?

Classroom placement is worked out between the school and the parent.

9. Why should my non-allergic child be subjected to food restrictions in his/her classroom?

Unlike the cafeteria, classrooms do not mandate the same level of cleaning after snack. Despite best intentions, it is possible for a child eating in a classroom to spread the allergen to common surfaces and classroom materials, which becomes a potentially life-threatening risk for the child with food allergies in the classroom. Children with food allergies should have a safe academic environment where they can focus on learning and not worry about food allergen exposure.

10. How are school celebrations (birthdays, holidays, etc.) handled with regards to food consumption?

Non-food treats and activities should be used for school celebrations.

11. What happens when a student with food allergies goes on a field trip?

A few days prior to the field trip, the teacher will send home two forms for the parent to fill out:

- Parental Authorization for Field Trip
- Student Field Trip Emergency Contact Information and Medical Authorization

Parents should fill out these forms completely. The teacher and the school clinic staff will ensure that the teacher has each student's emergency medicines (auto-injector, Benadryl, etc.), emergency contact/medical information, as well as stock (generic) epinephrine. When the class gets back from the trip, the teacher returns all medications to the school health clinic.

12. Have my child's teachers received training on auto-injector administration and food allergy awareness?

Yes, school staff is trained annually by public health nurses (PHNs) in auto-injector administration and food allergy awareness.

13. Who monitors what students with food allergies buy to ensure that it is safe for that student?

Parents can review the school menus for allergy information at apsva.nutrislice.com. Food services can also be contacted at 703-228-6133 with specific concerns regarding food allergies and ingredients.

14. Are bus drivers aware of and trained on recognizing and treating allergic reactions?

Bus drivers receive annual training on recognizing emergency situations. However, they are not trained to provide treatment. If there is an emergency on a bus, the driver will notify the dispatcher by radio. The dispatcher in turn will call 911.