

# Appendix 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 two 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. Medications, such as epinephrine, that are prescribed by a doctor are used to control symptoms of an allergic reaction after they occur. Emergency treatment

is critical for someone having a severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis. 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.

### 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.\* The reaction can be a serious, life-threatening condition and should be diagnosed by a licensed physician or board-certified allergist. Symptoms of a food allergic reaction may include hives, itchy watery eyes, swelling of lips and 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 some foods that cause allergic reactions?

There are eight most common foods that cause an allergic reaction. These foods are called "the top eight allergens" and should be listed on food labels. These foods include:

- ▶ **Cow's Milk** – includes anything made from cow's milk, such as yogurt, cheese, butter, or milk-based formulas. Goat's milk should also be avoided if someone is allergic to cow's milk.
- ▶ **Eggs** – includes whites, yolks, and powdered eggs.



- ▶ **Peanuts** – includes peanut flour and hydrolyzed protein. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file if peanut oil also needs to be avoided.



- ▶ **Tree nuts** – includes, but is not limited to, walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios, and Brazil nuts. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file if coconuts or coconut oil also need to be avoided.

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- ▶ **Fish** – such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.
- ▶ **Shellfish** – such as crab, lobster, shrimp, clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, and squid.
- ▶ **Soy** – includes soybeans, soy protein, and soy flour. Check with the child's doctor or review the signed medical statement and care plan on file if soybean oil also needs to be avoided.
- ▶ **Wheat** – includes anything made from wheat, such as bread, pasta, cereal, and crackers. Wheat is sometimes found in ice cream, spaghetti sauce, or hot dogs. Wheat can also be found in modeling clay.

**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.**

There are other foods that can cause an allergic reaction. These foods may include sesame seeds, gelatin, sunflower seeds, beef, chicken, corn, fresh apples, carrots, tomatoes, or bananas.

### Is it food allergy or food intolerance?

Other food reactions or sensitivities to foods are known as **food intolerances**. Food allergy is sometimes confused with food intolerance. To find out the difference, a licensed physician or board-certified allergist will go through a list of possible causes for any symptoms. Food intolerances are often temporary and rarely life-threatening.

- ▶ **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 child care staff must be prepared to react quickly and effectively. Food allergy training is recommended for all child care staff, even if a program has no enrolled children with known food allergies.

- ▶ **Arrange for training to be 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. Include information about preventing exposure to specific food allergens, recognizing the symptoms of allergic reactions, and responding to allergic reactions.
- ▶ **Handle food allergies and food intolerances on a case-by-case basis.** If a child has either, be sure to have a medical statement or care plan on file stating the specific food allergy or food intolerance and the specific food or foods that should be avoided and provided instead. The steps to take in case of an allergic reaction should also be included. This medical statement must be signed by a licensed physician or recognized medical authority. Contact your State agency or sponsoring organization if additional guidance is needed.

*more tips on 'handling food allergies and intolerances' on next page ...*

... more tips on 'handling food allergies and intolerances'

- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **Know where emergency medications, such as epinephrine,** are stored and how they should be used in case a child has an allergic reaction in your child care program. 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, labels, and check food allergen content statements on packages. Products that contain any of the top eight allergens may have those allergens listed in bold in the ingredient list or may have the allergens listed immediately following the ingredient list.

- If a food product contains any of the top eight allergens, it might also have a “Contains” statement on the label. For example, “May contain wheat, milk, and soy ingredients.”

**Contains Wheat, Milk, Eggs, and Soy**



- Pay attention to labels that also 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 either of these statements on their label. They may list a food allergen only in the ingredient list and it might not be in bold type, so be sure to read the list carefully. Some food companies may list other allergens than the top eight.

- ▶ **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.** If children in your care have food allergies or food intolerances, provide menus to parents and caregivers. Make sure the menu highlights foods that may cause a reaction in their child.



more tips on 'handling food allergies and intolerances' on next page ...

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## How can a child tell the care provider that they are having an allergic reaction?

- ▶ **A child may try to tell the care provider in their own words if he or she is having an allergic reaction.** 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 the care provider in words if 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 their mouth is beginning to swell from an allergic reaction.

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

Everyone involved in planning, preparing, and serving food should be extremely aware of food allergy risks and be prepared. Staff training, 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. Here are some more steps to take to reduce the risk of children having a reaction to food:

### Clean

- ▶ **Child care staff should wash their hands *before and after* preparing and serving foods** for the food-allergic child. Soap should be used, not antibacterial gel sanitizers.



- ▶ **Wipe down counters and tables** with common household cleaners *before and after* meals and snacks.
- ▶ **Be sure to mop up spills properly** to prevent spreading the allergen to other surfaces.
- ▶ **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.

### 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, inform all staff of the way the kitchen is organized or post information in the program’s pantry.
- ▶ **To prevent spreading food allergens from one surface or utensil to another**, prepare foods for the allergic child first.
- ▶ **Be careful to use separate utensils** when preparing and serving food to the food-allergic child.





# My Notes: