

Safety Alert

Allergic Reaction Prevention



Allergies are Serious Business

It's hard to believe that foods and other common items that most of us eat and use every day can be harmful to others. But it's true! So, if you learn that a student has an allergy take it very seriously. Students with allergies need your help to prevent serious reactions. Allergic reactions can be from mild to severe, including anaphylaxis, which is a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction.

No one knows exactly why more and more children are becoming allergic to certain foods and other substances, but avoidance is the key to preventing an allergic reaction to any of these. By using the following tips you will help keep students with allergies safe.

1. Learn what your students are allergic to and help them avoid it.

Learning what a student in your care is allergic to is easy: just check the medical alert list for your class; ask the school nurse; or communicate with the child's parents. Finding out if foods and products are safe for your student to eat and use is another story. Even foods and products that have ingredient labels can be tricky, since manufacturers sometimes use scientific names instead of everyday names. (For example, did you know that casein is milk?)

If there's any question about a food or product being safe for an allergic student, don't allow the student to eat it or use it, and check with the school nurse.

Food Allergies

The most common food allergies are to peanuts, tree nuts (like walnuts, pecans, almonds, pistachio nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, and Brazil nuts), milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat, but realize any food can potentially be an allergen and cause a reaction. Also, be aware that products such as lotions and soaps may contain these allergens and cause a reaction, so these should be screened as well.

• Avoid using food in your lesson plans

For birthday parties and celebrations; celebrate with non-food treats and activities, like games, stickers, songs, and prizes. They're just as fun - maybe even more so - and everyone will be safe.

• If food must be used, choose non-allergenic foods that everyone can have.

Always make sure that you have parent-approved safe snacks on hand for your allergic students, so that they don't have to go without when everyone else is having a snack. Better yet, when possible, use non-food treats, incentives, and rewards.

• Don't allow food sharing in school.

Kids love to share or trade food with each other. But for those with food allergies, eating someone else's food is dangerous. Shared food may contain an ingredient that's harmful to an allergic student. Even if you think the food is safe, it's not worth taking the chance on what's in it, plus you may not be aware of every allergy of every student.

• Wash hands and surfaces after eating.

Just a small amount of food on your hands can get on desks, books, playground equipment, and many other things. If someone who is allergic touches these things, they may have a reaction. The easiest way to clean off any food-based allergen that is on your hands and eating surfaces is simply for everyone to wash their hands after eating and make sure eating surfaces are washed also. You'll all probably get fewer colds, too!

Latex Allergies

Latex is a milky liquid found in rubber trees. It is used to make many rubber products found in schools such as balloons, natural rubber or latex gloves, rubber bands, toys, educational manipulatives, adhesives, gym equipment, and floor mats. Latex can also be hidden in commonly used products in schools that you wouldn't suspect like clay, paint and other arts and crafts materials, mouse pads, pens, pencil grips and erasers. However, the most likely to cause allergic reactions are gloves and balloons.

- **The key to avoiding latex is to find substitute products made of safe, latex-free alternatives such as silicone, vinyl, and plastic.**
Latex balloons should be eliminated from all school functions, even if there are no students with a known latex allergy because they are a choking hazard. Mylar balloons are an acceptable substitute. Beware when choosing safe alternatives: a label of "hypoallergenic" does NOT mean that a product is latex-free.

Another Common Allergen – Insect Stings

During the spring, summer and early fall, students are more involved with outdoor activities and there is a greater chance of being stung by bees, wasps, hornets or yellow jackets (hymenoptera). These and other insect stings can be powerful allergens.

- **Instruct students not to swat at insects flying around them.** It is best to stand still or move away slowly.
 - **Encourage students to wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and closed shoes outside.** They should also avoid wearing bright colors, shiny jewelry, and clothes which are baggy or have flowery patterns.
 - **When eating outdoors keep food covered.** Do not allow students to eat or rest near trash bins. Have them avoid eating or drinking sweetened liquids outdoors and do not allow students to drink from open beverage cans. Stinging insects crawl inside cans because they are attracted by the sweet beverage. Instead pour the beverage into a clear cup. Keep students hands and face clean of sweet liquid: soda, juice, ice cream, butter, meat juices.
 - **Take precautions regardless of weather conditions.** Many insects are more likely to sting in gloomy and rainy weather.
2. **If a student or parent of the student, alerts you to an allergy the student has, be sure this information is shared with the nurse.**
 3. **Keep open lines of communication with parents about issues that might affect their child’s allergies.**
 4. **Be sure to notify substitute teachers and teacher aides about students’ allergies.**
 5. **Consider allergies when planning for field trips and class outings.** Be sure to include the school nurse and parents early in the planning process.

6. Know how to recognize the symptoms of an allergic reaction. If a student who has allergies becomes ill, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY!

How do you know when a student is having an allergic reaction? He or she may show signs of any or all of these common symptoms:

- Vomiting, stomach cramps, or diarrhea
- Swollen face, lips or other body parts
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing, wheezing
- Coughing, runny nose, sneezing, or watery eyes
- Skin that’s bumpy, red, and itchy
- Dizziness, fainting, or loss of consciousness

Symptoms sometimes appear within minutes, but can occur hours after exposure to an allergen.

If a student who has allergies is showing these signs or other unusual symptoms, call the school nurse immediately. Tell her it might be an allergic reaction. There is no way to know how serious a reaction will become, so it is important to treat all reactions quickly.

Remember, an allergic reaction can happen anytime, anywhere, when an allergic person comes into contact with his or her trigger, so always be on the alert. Protecting a person from exposure to offending allergens is the most important way to prevent a possibly life-threatening allergic reaction.

DISCLAIMER:

This Safety Tips Sheet is being provided for educational purposes only and is intended as training for all school staff in general precautions for allergic reaction recognition and prevention in students.

Although the information and recommendations contained in this Safety Tips Sheet have been compiled from sources* believed to be reliable, the Office of the Nassau BOCES Safety Coordinator makes no guarantee as to the correctness, sufficiency or completeness of such information or recommendations. Other or additional safety measures may be required under particular circumstances.

*For more information on allergies visit: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology at www.aaaai.org; Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis network at www.foodallergy.org; American Latex Allergy Association at www.latexallergyresources.org.

For more school safety and health information call the Safety Hotline at 396-2400.