

SCHOOL FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

Overview of Food Allergies

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is when the body mistakenly reacts to a certain food or ingredient as if it were harmful. The food that causes the reaction is called an allergen.

What are the symptoms of a food allergy reaction?

Symptoms can happen within a few minutes or up to a few hours after being eaten, inhaled, or coming in contact with the allergen. Symptoms can be seen or felt in different parts of the body.

Mild Symptoms	Severe Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gut: mild nausea or discomfort (stomach pain, abdominal cramping) ● Mouth: itchy; odd taste; slight, dry cough ● Nose: itchy, runny nose; sneezing; congestion ● Skin: a few hives (reddish, swollen, itchy areas on the skin), mild itch (sometimes in the ear canal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Body: lightheadedness, fainting or loss of consciousness, anaphylaxis ● Gut: repetitive vomiting or severe diarrhea ● Heart: pale, turning blue, faint, weak or “thready” pulse, dizziness, chest pain, drop in blood pressure ● Lung: shortness of breath, wheezing, repetitive cough, difficulty breathing ● Mouth: significant swelling of the tongue or lips ● Psychological: feeling something bad is about to happen, sense of impending doom, anxiety, confusion, feeling weak ● Skin: many hives over the body, widespread redness, eczema ● Throat: tight, hoarse, trouble breathing or swallowing, swelling

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction with a rapid onset that may cause difficulty breathing and death. It may disrupt breathing and blood circulation. An anaphylactic reaction usually occurs within minutes of being exposed to an allergen, but in some rare instances, it can occur a couple of hours later.

Symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Difficulty breathing, constriction of airways, tightness of the throat, hoarse voice
- Drop in blood pressure (e.g., pale, weak pulse, confusion, dizziness, fainting, weakness, loss of consciousness)
- Feeling of doom
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping)
- Rapid pulse, cardiac arrest
- Shock (i.e., drop in blood pressure and narrowing of airways)
- Skin symptoms (e.g., hives, swelling)
- Swollen lips



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What are the most common foods that cause allergic reactions?

The most common foods include:

- Crustacean shellfish (for example, shrimp, lobster, and crab)
- Eggs
- Fish
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Sesame
- Shellfish
- Soy
- Tree nuts (for example, walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, and pecans)
- Wheat

How are food allergies diagnosed?

A State licensed healthcare professional can diagnose food allergies by using a variety of tests. A State licensed healthcare professional is defined as an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law.

How are allergic reactions treated?

Treatment for an allergic reaction for a student will be determined by the State licensed healthcare professional and written in the emergency care section of the student's food allergy plan. Include specific State rules and local regulations about how school nutrition professionals can administer medicines in the food allergy plan. Follow the student's individual food allergy emergency care plan when responding to an allergic reaction. School nutrition staff cannot provide treatment outside of what is written in the plan. Treatments for an allergic reaction may include:

- Epinephrine (administered by an epinephrine auto-injector or nasal spray)
- Antihistamine
- Inhaler (bronchodilator)

How can an allergic reaction be avoided?

The best way to avoid a reaction is to avoid the food that causes the allergy. Develop a system for checking ingredient labels carefully and have a plan to limit the ways in which the child could have contact with the allergens, including airborne.

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when food containing an allergen comes in contact with food or surface that does not contain an allergen. For example, using a knife to spread peanut butter and using that same knife for cutting a turkey sandwich without properly cleaning in between could transfer peanut allergens.

References

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- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2022, February 17). *Food allergies*. <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/>

Institute of Child Nutrition
<http://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>

U.S. Department of Agriculture
<http://www.usda.gov>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Food Allergens
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-ingredients-packaging/food-allergens>

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