

Understanding Anaphylaxis in Schools

For some parents and guardians, sending a child with potentially life-threatening allergies off to school can feel like a daunting task. Successfully transitioning a child into school requires forming a partnership between parents or guardians and key individuals at the school, from teachers and classmates to school nurses and staff members.

These relationships are critical to ensure all members of the school community are educated in anaphylaxis management, because life-threatening allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) can happen at any time or anywhere.

Below are some steps to build this partnership and manage potentially life-threatening allergies in the school setting:

- Become educated. [Learn more](#)
 - Plan ahead. [Learn more](#)
 - Build a team. [Learn more](#)
 - Reduce allergens in the classroom. [Learn more](#)
 - Teach children self-management. [Learn more](#)
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Become Educated

- Be well-versed on the specific allergic trigger(s). Some of the most common items that can cause a life-threatening allergic reaction include foods like cow's milk, eggs and peanuts; latex (found in balloons or gloves used for cleaning); and insect stings.
 - Learn how the school supports students who may be at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions and their treatment approach, including accessibility to an [Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan](#).
 - Teach children self-management. Make sure each child understands:
 - ✓ Foods and/or environmental items that must be avoided
 - ✓ How to recognize the signs and symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction
 - ✓ How to describe a life-threatening allergic reaction to an adult in case of an emergency
 - ✓ The correct way to use an epinephrine auto-injector, if one has been prescribed
 - ✓ The importance of informing friends about their life-threatening allergies
 - Manage school meals
 - Don't forget the school bus
 - Prepare for field trips and extracurricular activities
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Plan Ahead

Providing information about a child's potentially life-threatening allergies and medications to the school is critical. Prior to the first day of school, a child with life-threatening allergies should have an [Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan](#) completed by his or her parent or guardian and allergist (or other licensed health care professional). The school may have its own form, or it may have a slightly different name.

The form should include:

- A complete list of the child's allergic triggers
- Where the child's epinephrine auto-injectors are kept
- Possible symptoms of the child's life-threatening allergic reaction
- The treatment that should be administered to the child, and under what circumstances
- Emergency contact information



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- Contact information for emergency medical services (i.e., 911), the child's allergist and the parent(s)/ guardian(s)
 - A current picture of the child
 - The signature of the child's allergist (or other licensed health care professional)
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Build a Team

Supporting students with potentially life-threatening allergies at school involves a team of individuals, including parents or guardians, teachers, nurses, administrators and key staff members. The school nurse is a critical member of the child's anaphylaxis management team while at school. Parents or guardians and their child should meet with the school nurse first to discuss a plan of action should anaphylaxis occur.

In working with the team, recognize up-front that some of the members might need additional time to learn about life-threatening allergies and the steps needed to avoid allergens in the school setting. Parents and guardians should be involved in educating this team about the child's life-threatening allergies, including reducing allergen exposure, recognizing symptoms and responding if anaphylaxis occurs.

Prior to the first day of school, members of the team should meet in person to:

- Introduce themselves and share information about the child with potentially life-threatening allergies including the child's anaphylaxis response plan
 - Find out what team members already know about life-threatening allergies
 - Provide information on the basics (about anaphylaxis), clear up any misconceptions and discuss the role team members have in managing the child's potentially life-threatening allergy
 - Ensure school personnel know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction, have access to epinephrine auto-injectors, and know how to use them in the case of anaphylaxis
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Reduce Allergens in the Classroom

Parents or guardians and teachers should discuss the role of allergens in the classroom. Determine whether strategies can be implemented to help avoid exposure to allergens and reduce the risk of a child having an anaphylactic reaction.

Such approaches may include:

- Having a "no food sharing" or "no food trading" rule
- Encouraging hand washing after food handling and eating
- Washing surfaces after eating or during class projects
- Using non food items for classroom projects, academic rewards and classroom celebrations
- Encouraging packaged food items with ingredient labels, as opposed to home-baked goods
- Considering alternatives to products that may contain allergens, such as modeling clay, papier mâché, crayons and soaps
- Keeping "safe snacks" in the classroom for unplanned events, along with safe, non perishable meals in case lunch is compromised or in the event of a shelter-in-place emergency or evacuation to another location



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Teach Children Self-Management

For children with potentially life-threatening allergies, reducing the risk of anaphylaxis involves making good choices, avoiding allergens and recognizing potentially dangerous situations. As children mature, learning how to manage their allergies is vitally important. The parent or guardian's role in each child's learning process is essential.

- Being prepared with "safe snacks" for the entire class so that the child can eat what everyone else does
- Having students store their lunches in a designated location
- Having the child's parent or guardian become a "classroom parent" to allow them advance notice of planned activities
- Including the child's parent or guardian at class events, such as field trips, to help the teacher monitor the child's exposure to potential allergens
- Making sure that substitute teachers are informed of the child's life-threatening allergies and are prepared in case of an anaphylactic reaction

When appropriate, teach children to:

- Raise awareness of life-threatening allergies among others (classmates, friends, etc.)
- Avoid eating any food with unknown ingredients, such as home-baked goods
- Avoid sharing or trading food with classmates
- Wash hands regularly to help reduce exposure to allergens
- Read product labels to identify potential allergens
- Avoid environmental triggers (i.e., bees)
- Recognize the symptoms of a life-threatening reaction and tell an adult immediately if they suspect an anaphylactic reaction in themselves or a classmate
- Inform friends about their potentially life-threatening allergies, how to recognize symptoms and how to describe anaphylaxis to an adult in case of an emergency
- Wear a medical identification bracelet that can help convey allergy information to emergency medical personnel
- Carry his or her prescribed epinephrine auto-injectors
- Report bullying or teasing so that appropriate action can be taken

Manage School Meals

Parents or guardians should have a conversation with the school's food service director, preferably before the start of the school year, to find out how the school cafeteria manages students at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions and whether the approach is appropriate for their child.



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Don't Forget the School Bus

Many schools have procedures for managing life-threatening allergies on buses/vans. Reach out to the school, Board of Education, and bus company to find out if these procedures exist at your child's school and to determine whether they are appropriate for your child. Keep in mind that children ride buses not only to and from school but also during field trips and for after-school activities.

Common school bus/van procedures include:

- A "no food" policy (unless medically necessary)
- Training drivers to recognize the symptoms of anaphylaxis and how to respond
- Special seating arrangements
- Equipping the bus driver with a cell phone or emergency radio device

Prepare for Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

A child's food allergy should not prevent him/her from attending field trips and participating in extracurricular activities. For children who are aware of the allergens that prompt a life-threatening allergic reaction, avoidance of the allergens is crucial. Parents should ask to be given advance notice about these events, allowing them to address any concerns.

Issues for parents, guardians, teachers and school staff to consider include:

- Who will be responsible for recognizing anaphylaxis signs and symptoms, and carrying the child's emergency medications, including epinephrine auto-injectors?
- Do the individuals in charge know how to recognize the symptoms of a life-threatening allergic reaction and respond, should one occur?
- Will the child be able to bring his or her own food?
- If the child is to receive a special meal, such as a sack lunch not supplied by the child, who will ensure that the meal given to the child is safe?
- Will the children eat at a restaurant or other type of food service establishment? If so, special arrangements may be necessary.
- What type of transportation will be involved (bus, van, private automobile)?

For more information about severe allergies in school, visit EpiPen.ca.



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