

Food Allergy in the Classroom: Finding a Balance

The increasing number of students with food allergies requires schools to set policies for managing food allergy. An effective policy includes peer education.

Children sometimes react to those who are different from them in either a positive and compassionate way or a negative and potentially hurtful way. When it comes to food allergy, education is the key to enlisting the help, understanding, and support of classmates. The following are some suggestions for encouraging a sense of community in your school while ensuring the safety of students with food allergy.

Peer Education

The more students know about food allergies, the better they can help classmates who have food allergy to stay safe, and the less likely they are to bully or harass them.

If students with food allergies are comfortable with public speaking, incorporate presentations from them into class lessons. FAAN's Be A Pal (Protect A Life from Food Allergies) program was designed to educate school-age children about food allergies, and it outlines ways students can help classmates. Presentation materials and a PAL certificate and brochure are available for downloading on our Website. www.foodallergy.org

Buddy System

Many schools use a buddy system for times when students are not under a teacher's or chaperone's direct supervision, such as when using the restroom or running an errand. Keep in mind that some students with food allergy will not show symptoms of an allergic reaction for up to 2 hours after eating an offending ingredient. Having a "buddy" who can alert an adult if a reaction occurs will ensure faster treatment.

Lesson Plans and Activities

Review carefully all lesson plans and activities for items that contain ingredients to which students are allergic, such as egg or peanut.

One study found that the majority of reactions in school occur outside the cafeteria. Another study found that craft projects using peanut butter caused 60% of skin contact reactions. Be prepared to handle accidental exposures at all times — not just during meals and snacks.

Designated Cafeteria Tables

Some schools designate a table or two in the cafeteria to be peanut-free or milk-free. One school nurse reported that the allergy-free table became the most popular table in her school.

Other schools do the opposite: they set aside an area for students who have foods

that contain an allergen, such as peanut or milk.

Harassment, Teasing, and Bullying

There have been reports of bullies who attempt to force a student to eat a reaction-inducing food, or throw food at a student, in order to cause a reaction. Treat all complaints of teasing, bullying, and harassment seriously, and address the offenders' behavior in the same manner as you would other dangerous or unacceptable behavior.

Be sure your policy provides a safe environment for all students without isolating any of them. Students who have food allergies should not have to eat alone, be sent elsewhere while the rest of the class works on a project, or be excluded from a field trip because of their food allergy. 🍷

Source: *Food Allergy News*, Fall 2003

FDA Approves New Drug for Allergy-Related Asthma

The federal Food and Drug Administration has approved a genetically-engineered product for treating allergy-induced asthma that can't be controlled by inhaled steroids. In clinical trials that included adolescents, the product, omalizumab, marketed as Xolair, was shown to decrease the number of episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, and cough. Approved as a second-line treatment to be used only after first-line treatments have failed, and only for allergy-related

asthma, the drug has not been tested for use in children under 12. Xolair is manufactured by Genentech and will be marketed jointly with Novartis Pharmaceutical Corp. The product's label advises skin or blood tests to determine if asthma is allergy-related, since only people who have asthma caused by allergies can benefit from the new treatment. 🍷

Source: *Health and Health Care in Schools*