



Frequently Asked Questions

Food Allergies and District Food Guidelines

Why do we have our food guidelines?

In compliance with recent national legislation (FAAMA) and Ohio Revised Code 3313.719, which directs all Ohio school districts to put in place a policy safeguarding students from food related allergies and medical conditions, the Forest Hills School District has adopted important guidelines. These guidelines safeguard students from life-threatening (peanut or other) food-related allergies as well as extreme medically related conditions. Forest Hills School District currently has 540 students with health plans for chronic health conditions.

Why are food allergies important?

Food allergies can be fatal. They cause about 30,000 emergency room visits and claim about 150 lives each year in the US. Food allergies are becoming more common.

What is a food allergy, anyway?

A food allergy is an unusual, bad reaction to a food. The body's immune system reacts to an otherwise harmless food as if it were harmful. The body releases chemicals, including histamines. These cause symptoms in different parts of the body. The most common food allergies are to peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soy, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, and wheat. Other foods can cause allergies too.

Is there a cure for food allergies?

No. Right now there is no cure. The most important thing is to prevent a reaction. That means keeping allergy-causing foods away from the person with the allergy.

Why do schools need to address food allergies?

Most kids who have allergic reactions to food have them at school. Because reactions can be life threatening, schools need to take steps to protect all students. Schools need to be a safe place for all kids to learn.

Why are our classrooms free of nuts/peanuts? If students with allergies are not eating the food why do we have to worry about what we bring into the classroom? Can't the allergic child just avoid the nuts/peanuts?

Peanut allergies are usually severe and can be fatal. In fact, even a tiny amount of exposure to peanut particles or residue through the eyes, nose or mouth can cause a strong or even fatal reaction. Even with medical treatment the person can die within minutes. Because of the severity of peanut allergies, having the allergic child simply avoid peanut products is not enough. Peanut residue can remain on desktops, utensils, containers, and table tops. Touching something with peanut residue can prove fatal to the allergic child.

Are peanuts the same as nuts?

No. Peanuts are a member of the legume family. All other nuts are "tree" nuts, e.g. walnuts, cashews, almonds, etc. Allergies to tree nuts can also be severe.

What are the symptoms of a food allergy?

Symptoms can range from mild to severe to life-threatening. Symptoms can happen in any part of the body. Most common are:

- Skin (itching, hives, rash, swelling of the lips, tongue and throat);
- Breathing (runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing);
- Digestion (cramps, vomiting, diarrhea); and
- Blood (drop in blood pressure, lightheadedness, fainting, and shock).

Symptoms may start immediately after a child has eaten or even touched a contaminated surface or food. Symptoms may also appear up to two hours later. Serious reactions are life-threatening and are called anaphylaxis.

Why is a peanut allergy so dangerous?

Even small amounts of peanuts can be life threatening. Peanuts may be used in many of the foods kids like and eat. The most common types of these foods are: chocolates, cookies, candies, cakes, icing, and granola bars. Special occasions such as Easter, Halloween, Christmas and birthday parties are more dangerous for children with peanut allergies because these foods are often present. Allergic reactions to peanut can happen when peanut butter is used for school projects, e.g., bird seed balls, pet bedding, or pet food. Accidental contact and cross contamination with peanut residue is also a serious concern.

Examples of how accidents with foods can happen (* have resulted in deaths)

1. Eating unlabeled foods *. If in doubt, don't.
2. Accidental contamination of other foods (e.g., jam, butter or of eating utensils, food trays, table and toys). A common problem is jam contaminated with peanut butter by using the same knife*. Remember that even if a peanut allergic child is not offered peanut butter, eating jam at home where there is peanut butter may not be safe. Packing peanut butter sandwiches with other food*.
3. Unpackaged foods (e.g., cookie jar) may contain traces of nuts from previous nut containing cookies. Another cookie taken from that jar may contain traces of nuts on it. Bulk foods and buffet meals may also be dangerous because of cross contamination. Free cookies at stores.

4. Contamination during preparation (e.g., a cutting board used to cut 2 foods such as chicken and fish, the chicken served to a fish allergic person or the same board or knife to slice or grind nuts). Using the same oil to fry different foods, or the same batter for different foods, or the same frying utensils for different foods without washing in between can all cause cross contamination. Grinding specialty nut flavored coffees in a coffee grinder. Baking muffins with and without nuts if leftover batter is used for other muffins or if baking pans are not properly cleaned.
5. Contamination during serving (e.g., sauces mixed by spillage, the same scoop used to take scoops of different ice creams, some of which contain nuts; a knife used to cut a nut containing dessert and used to cut another dessert).
6. Relying on someone who does not know but who tells you the food is safe (e.g., another child, or someone who did not prepare the food such as a waiter, salesclerk or flight attendant).
7. Trying a food to see if you are "still allergic" especially with an anaphylactic allergy.
8. Tasting a food carefully to see if it is safe or not is dangerous. *
9. A change in the way a usual food is made (e.g., a change in the ingredient list without any obvious change on looking at the container. A new chef at a restaurant may change the recipe and add a "secret ingredient").*
10. Candy machines may have different foods at different times and candies may be contaminated with traces of nuts if there were nuts in the dispensing machine before.
11. Be aware of unusual sources of allergenic foods. See list "WHAT MAY CONTAIN PEANUT."
12. Non-food sources of peanut (e.g., homemade playdough, homemade scented crayons, cosmetics or fishing lures with peanut, peanut shell stuffing in bean bags, draft stoppers, stuffed toys, peanut in animal food (e.g., hamster, gerbil and bird food granules such as lovebirds).

Why does food have to be individually wrapped and from an inspected facility?

Class contamination; cleanliness; Ability to read food label and make informed decisions; allows all students to have a healthier awareness.

The item I have doesn't have nuts why do we need to have a label?

Foods can be hidden in different ingredients so having the ingredient labels is important to determine if the food is a safe food for a student with allergies. You can't tell by looking at a food if it has nut products or may have been processed on a line with other nut products which would be unsafe for a student with a nut allergy to consume. Students with diabetes also need to monitor their carbohydrate count and the label will provide them with the information needed.

What other items or activities may have common allergens?

Coffee creamer, pet bedding, lotion, soap, seed planting

Why are we taking these precautions for just one or two students?

It is no longer one or two children suffering from food allergies in schools. Food allergies are on the rise and we have a large amount of students in our district with allergies and other food related conditions. All children have the right to get an education in a safe learning environment. We need to cooperate and make sure all kids are safe.

If my child has a serious food allergy are the food guidelines enough to keep them safe?

If your child suffers from a serious food allergy you can request to have your child evaluated for a 504 plan that would look at their needs on a more individualized basis. For more information on 504 plans, please contact your building's case coordinator.

Can my child bring a snack?

Having snack in the classroom may vary building to building depending on the needs of the students in that building. If building administrators allow snacks they must be peanut free and individually wrapped with ingredients listed on the label.

Can I bring in a snack for my child's birthday?

Bringing in birthday treats may vary from building to building too depending on the needs of the students in that building. If your building allows birthday treats they must be individually wrapped, with ingredients listed on the label and must be peanut free.

[Additional information on food allergies can be found at foodallergy.org](http://foodallergy.org)