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Helping Schools become FoodAllergy SmartTM

www.foodallergysmart.org

Recommended School Training: How to CARE for Kids with Food Allergies

Teachers and staff who supervise food-allergic students should receive training on the following:

Comprehending food allergy basics.

The following six statements provide a simple yet comprehensive introduction to the basic medical facts:

- A food allergy is an overreaction of the immune system that can affect any system of the body, including the respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and skin systems.
- Ingestion of even a minute amount of the allergen can trigger this overreaction and cause a variety of symptoms ranging from mild nausea or itching to *anaphylaxis* (a systemic allergic reaction that can kill within minutes).
- There is no cure for food allergies. Strict avoidance of the allergenic food is the only way to prevent a potentially life-threatening reaction.
- An allergic reaction can occur up to two hours (and sometimes, though rarely, up to four hours) after ingestion.
- The severity and progression of an allergic reaction is unpredictable: a seemingly mild reaction can turn fatal within minutes.
- Anaphylactic reactions are treated by prompt administration of epinephrine. Time is of the essence and may mean the difference between life and death. Transport to an emergency room must follow. Repeat administration of epinephrine may be required.

Avoiding the Allergen.

Because strict avoidance of the allergen is the only way to prevent reactions, it is crucial that teachers and staff be given practical information on how to make the classroom/lunchroom/playground safe for food-allergic students. Topics to cover include:

- How to read food ingredient labels. (Demonstrations with actual labels are especially helpful.)
- How to check the ingredients in art supplies and in other products that may contain allergens, such as soaps or hand lotions.
- How to prevent cross-contamination by using proper cleaning methods for tables and other surfaces.
- The importance of teaching students to wash hands before and *after* contact with food.

Recognizing a Reaction.

Early recognition of symptoms saves lives. Every allergic reaction is different. It is critical for school personnel to know that a child experiencing anaphylaxis may show no skin symptoms whatsoever. The symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction include:

- Mouth - Itching, tingling, or swelling of lips, tongue, mouth
- Skin - Hives, itchy rash, swelling of the face or extremities
- Gut - Nausea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea
- Throat - Hacking cough, tightening of throat, hoarseness
- Lung - Shortness of breath, repetitive cough, wheezing
- Heart - Thready pulse, low blood pressure, fainting, pale, blueness

Enacting Emergency Action Plan!

Every school should have its own emergency protocols. Teachers and staff must be taught exactly what to do in the event of an anaphylaxis emergency, particularly what their school's protocol is for:

- Administering the epinephrine auto-injector (EpipenTM or TwinjectTM).
- Calling 911.