

# Food Allergy Safe Schools: The Basics

Food allergies are a common medical condition in students. Quickly recognizing and treating food allergy reactions can be lifesaving. **Everyone supervising students with food allergies should know how to recognize a food allergy reaction and what to do.** This guide will help you learn what food allergies are, how to recognize the signs and symptoms, and how to prevent exposure to food allergens.

## STEP 1: Educate Yourself About Food Allergies

### What Is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy is when your body's immune system reacts to a certain food. Your body thinks that food (the allergen) is a threat and tries to attack it. This response can cause a range of symptoms.



**About 2 students in EVERY classroom** have a food allergy



**1 in 4** life-threatening food allergy reactions in the school setting happen in people with NO diagnosed food allergy including faculty and staff

## What Are the Top 9 Food Allergens in the U.S.?

People can be allergic to any food, but nine foods cause the most food allergy reactions in the U.S.



Peanut



Tree Nuts



Milk



Eggs



Wheat



Soy



Finned Fish



Shellfish



Sesame

### Why Are Food Allergies Serious?

Food allergy reactions are unpredictable, and reactions can be mild or very severe. A reaction that starts out mild can quickly become life-threatening. The most dangerous allergic reactions are called **anaphylaxis** (a-nuh-fuh-LAK-suhs). Anaphylaxis can cause death by making it hard for a person to breathe or pump blood. The only treatment to stop anaphylaxis is a medicine called epinephrine.

### Three Important Things You Should Know

- 1. Even a trace amount of allergic food can cause a serious reaction.** The only way to prevent a serious reaction is to avoid the food entirely.
- 2. Not all reactions are the same.** A life-threatening reaction to a food can happen even if someone has never had a serious reaction before.
- 3. Recognize the signs and symptoms of food allergy reactions.** In a serious reaction, seconds count! Getting the food allergic person treatment right away is more likely to keep a reaction from progressing or resulting in death.

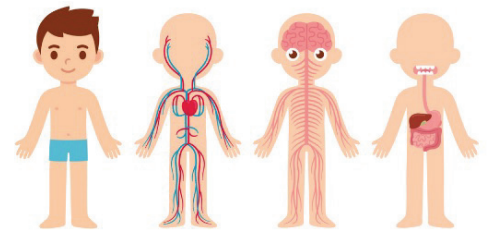
## STEP 2: Learn How to Recognize the Symptoms of Food Allergies

### Be on the Lookout for Food Allergy Reactions

- The first symptoms of a reaction to food can appear within a few seconds or up to two hours after exposure.
- Symptoms can sometimes come back minutes or hours after treatment with epinephrine. When this happens, it is called a biphasic reaction.
- A food allergy reaction can involve one, two, or many symptoms.
- Symptoms can affect different parts of the body and can be mild to very severe.

## Severe Symptoms Include

- **Lung:** shortness of breath, wheezing, repetitive cough
- **Heart:** grey or bluish skin (note that in brown or darker skin this may be easier to see on the palms or soles of the feet), faint, weak pulse, dizzy
- **Throat:** tight, hoarse, trouble breathing/swallowing
- **Mouth:** significant swelling of the tongue or lips
- **Skin:** may have hives over body, widespread redness or discoloration (including grey or bluish tone)
- **Gut:** repetitive vomiting or severe diarrhea
- **Psychological:** feeling something bad will happen, anxiety, confusion



## Mild Symptoms Include

- **Nose:** itchy or runny nose, sneezing
- **Mouth:** itchy mouth
- **Skin:** a few hives, mild itch
- **Gut:** mild nausea or discomfort

### If You Suspect a Reaction: Act Fast, Seconds Count. Remember, Epi First, Epi Fast!

Here is what you need to know about epinephrine:

- Epinephrine is safe and simple to administer.
- If you suspect anaphylaxis, immediate treatment with epinephrine is critical.
- Be sure to **review your school's policy and procedures** about what to do and who to alert if you suspect a food allergy reaction is happening.

## STEP 3: Learn to Prevent Allergen Exposure

**There is no cure for food allergies. Completely avoiding the food allergen is required to stay safe.**

### Simple Steps to Prevent Food Allergen Exposure:



**Wash your hands** with soap and water or disposable, fragrance-free wipes before and after preparing, serving, or eating. **Hand sanitizer does NOT remove food allergens and is not an alternative to handwashing.**



**Clean surfaces** before and after meals/snacks with soap and water or disposable wipes. **Sanitizing sprays, gels, or bleach do NOT remove food allergens.**

- During meal and snack times, **ensure students have adequate space to sit and eat.**
- **Keep classrooms food-free, if possible.** If eating in classrooms is necessary, designate separate space for eating and follow the hygiene rules listed above before returning to the learning area.
- **Discourage food sharing.**

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