

History:

The *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs* (now called the *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies*), were developed in response to Section 112 of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act. *The Food Safety Modernization Act* was passed by Congress in 2011. This act was designed to improve food safety in the United States by shifting the focus from response to prevention. In Section 112, voluntary guidelines were created to manage the risk of food allergy and anaphylaxis in school, which are easily available to local schools. The guidelines help schools develop a plan where one doesn't exist. The resulting *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies* follow five priority areas that should be addressed in each school. These five priority areas are as follows:

1. Ensure the daily management of food allergies in individual children
2. Prepare for food allergy emergencies
3. Provide professional development on food allergies for staff members
4. Educate children and family members about food allergies
5. Create and maintain a healthy and safe educational environment.

About food allergies:

More than 170 foods are known to cause serious allergic reactions. The following eight foods or food groups account for 90% of serious allergic reactions: milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts. Food allergies account for 35%-50% of all cases of anaphylaxis in emergency care settings. In the United States, fatal or near fatal reactions are most often caused by peanuts (50%-62%) and tree nuts (15%-30%). Approximately 20-25% of epinephrine administrations in schools involve individuals whose allergy was unknown at the time of the reaction. More than 15% of school aged children with food allergies have had a reaction in school.

Emotional impact on children with food allergies and their parents:

The health of a child with a food allergy can be compromised at any time by an allergic reaction to food that is severe or life threatening. Many studies have shown that food allergies have a significant effect on the psychosocial well-being of children with food allergies and their families.

Parents of a child with a food allergy may have constant fear about the possibility of a life-threatening reaction and stress from constant vigilance needed to prevent a reaction. They also have to trust their child to the care of others, make sure their child is safe outside the home, and help their child have a normal sense of identity.

Children with food allergies may also have constant fear and stress about the possibility of a life-threatening reaction. The fear of ingesting a food allergen without knowing it can lead to coping strategies that limit social and other daily activities. Children can carry emotional burdens because they are not accepted by other people, they are socially isolated, or they believe they are a burden to others.

They also may have anxiety and distress that is caused by teasing, taunting, harassment, or bullying by peers, teachers, or other adults. School and ECE program staff must consider these factors as they develop plans for managing the risk of food allergy for children with food allergies.

Food Allergy Management in Schools:

Essential first steps-

1. Use a coordinated approach that is based on effective partnerships
2. Provide clear leadership to guide planning and ensure implementation of food allergy management plans and practices.
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for managing food allergies.

Recommended practices for reducing the risk of exposure to food allergens and responding to food allergies in schools and ECE programs:

In the classroom,

- Avoid the use of identified allergens in class projects, parties, holidays, and celebrations, arts, crafts, science experiments, cooking, snacks, or rewards
- Avoid ordering foods from restaurants because food allergens may be present, but unrecognized.
- Use nonfood incentives for prizes, gifts, and awards

School nurse's role: Create and maintain a healthy and safe school environment,

-Work with other school staff and parents to create a safe environment for students with food allergies. On a regular basis, assess the school environment, including the cafeteria and classrooms, to identify allergens in the environment that could lead to allergic reactions. Work with appropriate staff to develop strategies to help children avoid identified allergens.

-Make sure that food allergy policies and practices address competitive foods, such as those available in vending machines, in school stores, fundraisers, during class parties, at athletic events, and during after-school programs.

-Work with school counselors and other school staff to provide emotional support to students with food allergies.

-Promote an environment that encourages students with food allergies to tell a staff member if they are bullied because of their allergy.

Section 5. Federal Laws and Regulations that Govern Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs

-The federal laws and regulations described in this section address the responsibilities of schools and early care and education (ECE) programs to help children and adolescents manage food allergies that may constitute a disability under federal law and to ensure that children are not subject to discrimination on the basis of their disability.

Sources:

http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_a_food_allergy_web_508.pdf

<http://www.nasn.org/portals/0/Anaphylaxis/web/faq.html>