

FOOD ALLERGIES IN DAYCARE

AUTHOR: CARLA SNUGGS • PUBLISHED: FEB 17, 2009

Food allergies are common in young children. Daycare providers must be aware of food allergies and have a food allergy plan in place in order to keep kids safe.

Within the scope of child safety <http://day-care-regulations.suite101.com/article.cfm/daycare_food_safety> , preschool teachers and daycare providers must consider the threat of food allergies. 4 out of 100 children have a food allergy, according to recent studies by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

In addition, children under age 5 years have higher rates of reported food allergy than children aged 5 to 17 [Center for Disease Control, 2009].

What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy is an inappropriate reaction by the body's immune system in response to the ingestion of a food and the food is one that causes no adverse affects in the majority of individuals. Symptoms usually present within minutes to two hours after the child has ingested the food to which he or she is allergic. The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network <<http://www.foodallergy.org/default.htm>> lists common symptoms as: "a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and the throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, and even death".

Common Food Allergies in Preschool Children

The most common food allergies in young children are caused by:

- Cow's milk
- Eggs
- Soybeans
- Peanuts
- Wheat
- Tree nuts (cashews, almonds, pecans, and walnuts)

Tips for Managing Daycare Food Allergies

Sue Adair, Senior Manager of Quality Assurance for The Goddard School <<http://www.goddardschool.com/Default.aspx>> , offers the following advice for dealing with the individual needs of children with food allergies:

- Ask parents to provide you with complete information about the allergy, e.g., foods to avoid, cross-sensitivities, and treatment, home and work numbers.
- Discuss food allergies with the class and stress its seriousness. Invite a guest from the Health Unit or Allergy Asthma Information Association to speak to the children.
- Inform other parents about this health issue too. Ask for their cooperation in reinforcing class food rules with their children.
- Consider banning specific foods from the classroom or the school if children have severe food allergies. They could react to very small quantities in the air, when someone nearby is eating the food or when a jar of the food is open close by. Let families know that the school is allergen sensitive and will do its best to keep the allergen out of the school.
- Ask the children not to share lunches or trade snacks.
- Discourage allergic children from trying foods they are unsure of.
- When foods are served in the classroom, choose ones that are plain and readily identified such as fruits and vegetables. It may be safest not to plan class celebrations around food.
- If you do ask parents to donate foods for special occasions, make sure they are store bought and have ingredients listed.
- Avoid using problem foods in arts and crafts activities, e.g., peanut butter in play dough and suet balls.
- Know where the child's EpiPen or Anakit is located and how to administer it. A Public Health Nurse can provide training sessions for teachers.

Managing preschool or daycare when there are children with known food allergies in your care requires awareness, education, and communication between caregivers and parents. In addition when parents select childcare <http://daycare.suite101.com/article.cfm/evaluating_daycare> , they should choose a provider that is abreast of food allergies and their symptoms and has a food allergy plan in place.