



## FOOD ALLERGY FACTSHEET

### What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is an abnormal reaction to a food. It is caused by the immune system's abnormal response to a food and occurs in 1% to 3% of school children. **A food allergy differs from other adverse food reactions such as food intolerances.** For example, lactose intolerance does not involve the immune system but is caused by the body's inability to digest lactose sugar found in cow milk products. Lactose intolerance causes gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea.

### What foods cause food allergic reactions?

While any food potentially can cause a food allergy, the few foods that are responsible for most food allergic reactions in children include the ingestion of eggs, cow milk, peanuts, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish, and tree nuts. In some cases, an allergic reaction can occur if the allergen is inhaled or if it comes into contact with the person's skin.

### What are the typical symptoms that occur during a food allergic reaction?

Symptoms of a food allergic reaction can range from mild and bothersome to severe and life-threatening. They may involve several body systems including the 1) skin, leading to hives, swelling, itchy red rash, or eczema; 2) gastrointestinal tract, causing itching and/or swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat, nausea, abdominal pain/discomfort, vomiting, and/or diarrhea; 3) respiratory tract, inducing watery, itchy eyes, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, cough, chest tightness, wheezing, or shortness of breath. The most severe form of food allergy, called anaphylaxis, which means "without protection," may lead to a serious fall in blood pressure and unconsciousness. Food allergic reactions generally occur rather quickly, usually within minutes to 1 to 2 hours after the allergenic food is eaten or contacted.

### Can food allergies kill?

Yes, severe anaphylactic reactions to foods may be fatal.

### What is the parent/guardian's responsibility with regard to the school and the food-

Parents/guardians are responsible for creating a partnership with the nurse, the teachers, and their child in order to prevent food allergic reactions in the school. The school needs to be informed about a food allergy in order to: 1) avoid or prevent food allergic reactions, 2) recognize a reaction should one occur, and 3) give prompt treatment. The parent/guardian needs to supply the child with an appropriate lunch, snack, and treats for unexpected classroom celebrations. If medication is required, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide the nurse with the necessary medication required to treat the reaction.  
for the child

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade/Room: \_\_\_\_\_

- My child has the following food intolerances: \_\_\_\_\_
- My child has the following food allergies: \_\_\_\_\_
- My child has no known food intolerance or allergy.

Parent/guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DISTRIBUTION: School nurse, Homeroom teacher