



FOOD ALLERGEN MANAGEMENT GUIDE FOR SCHOOL CANTEENS

Why is it important to consider food allergy when preparing food?

Students with food allergy and their parents are often anxious about eating food prepared away from home. It is important that staff in school canteens, paid and voluntary, understand the importance of safe food preparation for students with food allergy.

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FOOD ALLERGY

is an immune system reaction to a food protein.

ANAPHYLAXIS

is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening.

FOOD INTOLERANCE

is the inability to digest a food which can cause discomfort and distress but is not life threatening. A food allergy is not the same as food intolerance as it does not involve the immune system.

Purchasing food outside the home is very much part of life today and is an enjoyable experience for all. Often a student's first introduction to independent food purchasing is from the school canteen. When a student starts school, purchasing from the canteen should be a fun and exciting new experience, even for the student with food allergy. With care, appropriate foods can be purchased by students with food allergy.

Good communication is important, and it can help to ease anxiety regarding food allergies. For example:

- Be open and approachable. Encourage parents of students with food allergy to visit the canteen to check which food products may be appropriate for their child at any given time.
- Talk to school staff and communicate to the school community through newsletters, website, social media about the management of food allergy within the canteen and the school so that everyone is aware of the risk minimisation strategies used.

Remember, a strategy used for one food allergen may be different to another (e.g. a school may decide to remove all peanut and tree nut products from the school canteen, but they cannot remove all milk and egg products). Strategies must be implemented to manage risk whether the food allergen is in the canteen or not. A presumption should never be made that a canteen is 'peanut free'.

- Keep the school community up to date when new products are introduced to the canteen through the school newsletter, website and social media.



What can school canteens do to manage food allergy?

School canteens can make food selection from the school canteen a safer, positive experience for students with food allergy. There are several things that can be put in place to make sure students with food allergy are able to purchase appropriate food from the school canteen. These strategies will also support staff with food allergy.

1. Know what's in your food

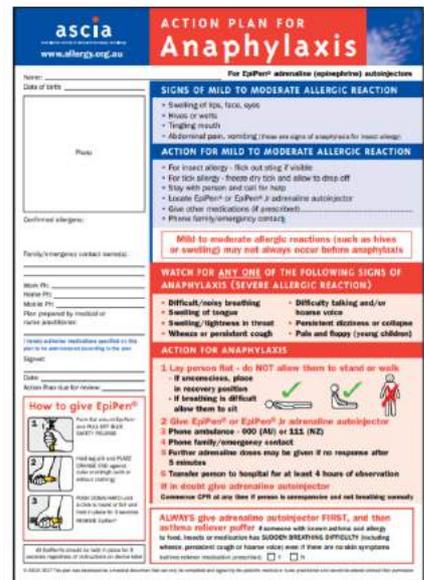
- Upon request, you must provide accurate information when a parent, student or staff member asks about allergens in the food the canteen is serving
- [A food allergen menu matrix](#) can help you keep ingredient information up to date
- Food labels must always be checked EVERY time stock arrives to determine whether the food is appropriate for students with food allergy
- For products with no labels (e.g. baked goods), suppliers are required by law, to give you an accurate and complete list of ingredients contained in their product/s, in writing (called a Product Information Form or PIF). If the information received is not satisfactory, consider changing suppliers to one that can support your needs and answer your questions
- Read all labels regularly and before selling any food or drink to students who have a food allergy
- If a food product has an ingredient that you know the student is allergic to, the food is not suitable for that student.
- If you are not sure about an ingredient, do not give the food to the student with the food allergy. Speak with the parent so you are prepared in case the student requests the food again.
- Products with “may contain...” statements are plentiful and it is not necessary to remove all such products from the school or school canteen. However, they should not be served to students with the food allergy. For example, “may contain traces of nuts” labelled products should not be given to students with a peanut or tree nut allergy.



2.

Be 100% truthful

- Once you are aware that a student has a food allergy, ensure you are very clear on what food allergens are in the food the student or staff member with food allergy has ordered, be open and approachable if they have any questions about the food products and answer their questions honestly so that they can make an informed decision
- If you are not sure about the food allergen content of a food, it is important to let them know.
- You must provide accurate information about the food offered as required by the Food Act 2008. Strategies to ensure you are aware of students with food allergy include:
 - » Requiring parents to disclose their child’s food allergy to the school and Canteen Supervisor
 - » Consider displaying a copy of the student’s ASCIA Action Plan (including a photo) in the canteen visible to canteen staff and volunteers but not to students. This should be discussed as part of the student’s individual anaphylaxis health care plan.
 - » Reminding the school community (newsletters, or a note on the lunch order form/menu) about the requirement to inform staff in the canteen when ordering/purchasing food (parents take on this role for younger students) and students with food allergy must again disclose their allergy when collecting their food order. Where the canteen takes lunch orders, the student’s food allergy can be disclosed when ordering. For cafeteria style canteens, students will need to check food allergen content when purchasing the food.



Can we create a “nut free school”?

It is unrealistic to think a school can be ‘free’ of any allergen. Someone on the school campus may have the allergen in their lunch box either intentionally or unintentionally. If you choose to label your school or school canteen, ‘allergy aware’ is a more appropriate term. This reflects that you are aware of all allergens (not just nuts) and have a range of strategies in place to prevent food allergic reactions. It is critical that a number of strategies are implemented to reduce risk to a student with severe allergy. There is no one rule for all schools or for all individuals at risk of anaphylaxis. Dependent on the age, maturity of the child and allergens involved, risk minimisation strategies will differ.

3.

Prepare food safely

- **Training**

- » The Canteen Supervisor (and other paid canteen staff) should attend anaphylaxis training offered to other school staff
- » The Canteen Supervisor (and other paid canteen staff) should undertake the All about Allergens online training available free of charge
- » Canteen volunteers should be encouraged to undertake the All about Allergens training as this will help increase their knowledge and awareness about managing food allergy and staff will be more likely to work as a team to minimise risks
- » Ensure all canteen staff (including volunteers) are educated about cross contamination risks of food allergens during storage, preparation and serving of foods.

- **Cross contamination**

- » Cross contamination occurs when food allergens come into contact with food that does not contain that allergen. For example:
 - » Using a knife that has been used to cut an egg sandwich to then cut a cheese sandwich for a student with egg allergy
 - » Using the cutting board previously used for grating cheese when making a chicken sandwich for a student with milk allergy
 - » Warming the chicken nuggets for a student allergic to fish on the same tray that was used for fish fingers.



It is a good idea to think about cross contamination of food allergens the same way you think about bacteria cross contamination. It only takes a very small, non-visible amount of food allergen (or bacteria) to cause big problems.

- **Identifying lunch orders**

- » The canteen may choose to have different coloured lunch order bags (where used) for students with food allergy (e.g. white paper bags for students with allergy and brown paper bags for all other students or vice versa)
- » Request that parents/students write the student's food allergy on the lunch bag every time.

- **Canteen menu**

- » It is not reasonable or feasible to remove all food allergens from the school including the canteen
- » However, you should consider the needs of students with food allergy when planning the canteen menu, stock control and food offered on special days
- » Identify appropriate risk minimisation strategies to minimise the risk for students with food allergies.

3.

Prepare food safely *(continued)*

- **Food preparation**

- » Food for students with food allergy should be prepared by staff who have completed training in preparing food for people with food allergy and are aware of cross contamination risk (i.e. Canteen Supervisor)
- » Volunteer helpers should not be asked to prepare food for students with food allergies
- » Prepare food for students with food allergy first. Be aware that a food that is appropriate for one person with food allergy, can be life threatening for another, so extreme care needs to be taken when preparing each lunch order. For example, when making lunch for a student with milk allergy and lunch for a student with egg allergy, you need to consider cross contamination issues for both and ensure the cutting board and utensils have been cleaned with warm soapy water or put through the dishwasher between tasks
- » Preparation of sandwiches and rolls in canteens must be reviewed and areas where cross contamination could occur, need to be identified
- » The most effective way to manage cross contamination is to use clean equipment (e.g. cutting boards and utensils). However, some canteens may choose to have coloured cutting boards. Where equipment cannot be cleaned completely (e.g. a toasting grill), a clean sheet of baking paper can be used to prevent cross contamination when preparing food for a student with food allergy.



- **Food service**

- » Always have the Canteen Supervisor or other food allergy informed person serve the students with food allergies
- » A canteen staff member educated about food allergy must ALWAYS check the ingredient lists of foods purchased by individuals with food allergies, prior to serving
- » If the canteen operates on self-service basis (no orders), help students with food allergy to select an appropriate food item. Self-service canteens should offer a wide variety of foods (e.g. sandwiches/rolls, rice dishes, non-dairy items etc.) that have been prepared appropriately for students with food allergy (i.e. ingredients of each component checked and no cross contamination with common food allergens)
- » You may need to allow students with food allergy to place an order if there are no items on your menu that cater for them. They may order an item that is already available, but you can prepare it first to minimise the risk of cross contamination; or depending on the food allergy, you may need to provide a slightly modified version of an existing item.

Remember, communication is the key when it comes to providing food for a person with food allergy. It is always best to talk with the parents and include students at an age appropriate level.



4.

Understand the consequences

- The only successful way to manage a food allergy is to avoid the food allergen. For a student with food allergy, even a small amount (traces) of the food they are allergic to, can cause an allergic reaction including severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis)
- Ensure staff and volunteers are aware of their obligation to provide accurate allergen information about the food served upon request.



Often a student's first introduction to purchasing food is from the school canteen and it should be a fun, exciting and safe experience.

Remember, the key to food allergy management in school canteens is:

1. Know what's in your food
2. Be 100% truthful
3. Prepare food safely
4. Understand the consequences.

Want more information?

National Allergy Strategy
nationalallergystrategy.org.au
Information about the National Allergy Strategy and current projects.

National Allergy Strategy
All about Allergens online training
foodallergytraining.org.au
Training, allergy education, information and resources for food service.

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia
allergyfacts.org.au
Resources including a Food Service Kit, food allergen cards and posters for your school and school canteen.

WA School Canteen Association Inc.
waschoolcanteens.org.au
Advice, menu planning, canteen management, training and resources.

ASCIA
allergy.org.au
Online anaphylaxis management training including how to prevent, recognise and respond to an allergic reaction including anaphylaxis.

Acknowledgments

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Frequently asked questions

How common are food allergies?

Food allergies are real and increasing among Australian children. Research shows that 10% of infants, 4-8% of children less than 5 years old, and 5% of young teens have food allergies. Approximately 2% of the population will have food allergies for life. Most schools now have several or even many children who have been diagnosed with a potentially life-threatening food allergy.

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction. It can be rapid in onset and must be treated as a life-threatening emergency. It requires the prompt administration of adrenaline by means of an adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen®). Students who have a prescribed adrenaline autoinjector must also have an ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis, which provides guidance on when and how to use the adrenaline autoinjector and further manage a potentially life-threatening emergency/anaphylaxis.

What are the most common food allergens?

There are 10 foods that are responsible for 90% of food induced allergic reactions in Australia. These include: egg, cow's milk, peanut, tree nuts (e.g. cashew, walnut, pistachio, hazelnut), fish, shellfish (e.g. prawn, lobster), sesame, soy, wheat and lupin. Lupin has recently been added by FSANZ as a common food allergen. Whilst these foods cause most food allergic reactions, any food has the potential to cause an allergic reaction including anaphylaxis.

Are food allergies life-long?

Peanut, tree nut and sesame allergy which are often diagnosed in childhood are usually life-long allergies. Children often grow out of cow's milk, egg, soy and wheat allergy but sometimes this does not happen until well into their school years. Some will, however, have these commonly outgrown food allergies for life. Fish and shellfish allergy is more common in adults and is usually life-long. People can develop an allergy to a food even if they have eaten it before without any sign of a reaction. This happens mostly in adults who, for example, ate shellfish regularly without a problem but then suddenly become allergic.

Does cooking the food remove the allergen?

No. However, some children with egg and milk allergy are able to tolerate baked egg or baked milk in food products. This must be confirmed by the student's allergist and generally foods containing baked milk/egg should not be given to students by the canteen.



Frequently asked questions

What information relating to allergens must be on a food label?

The food labelling laws (Food Standards Code) require the following major allergens to appear on the label if they have been used as an ingredient or as part of the processing of a product:

1. Peanut and peanut products
2. Tree nuts and tree nut products other than coconut
3. Crustacea (shellfish) and their products
4. Egg and egg products
5. Fish and fish products
6. Milk and milk products
7. Sesame seeds and sesame seed products
8. Soybeans and soybean products
9. Cereals containing gluten and their products, namely wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt and their hybridised strains (e.g. triticale)
10. Lupin.

If a food product has any of the above substances identified in the ingredients list, the food is not suitable for an individual with an allergy to that food. For products with no labels (e.g. baked goods), suppliers of these goods are required to give you a true list of ingredients contained in their product/s in writing so that you have it available if a customer asks about food allergen content. You can then share the information verbally or in writing. If the information received is not satisfactory, consider changing suppliers to one that can support your needs and answer your questions.



What about food for special events?

School staff, canteen staff and parents need to communicate and work out how best to manage the needs of the students with food allergy on special event days when products change and risks increase. Advance planning and communication including the parents (and older students in high school setting) is recommended.

Frequently asked questions

What about products with “may contain...” statements?

“May contain” statements are voluntary and unregulated and therefore it is often difficult to determine the real risk. If a food product has “May contain...” for any of the most common food allergens required to be listed by law, the food should not be given to a student with an allergy to the ingredient. For example, a product with ‘may contain traces of egg’ should not be given to a student with an egg allergy.

There are many products carrying these statements, but it is unnecessary to remove all such products from the school including the school canteen. These products pose a risk to the student with food allergy if they eat them. However, there is no risk to the student with food allergy by sitting alongside a student who is eating a product labelled as ‘May contain...’ or even a food that contains the food they are allergic to as long as no food sharing occurs. It is important that students with food allergy are not isolated from their friends when eating.

Do I need to check the food label every time?

Food labels must always be checked EVERY time stock (new products and those previously ordered) arrives to determine whether the food is appropriate for particular students with food allergy. Ingredients and manufacturing processes of commercially prepared foods often change, so it is important to check the label every time. If a food product arrives unpackaged and unlabelled, you must obtain a list of ingredients from the supplier.

Why remove peanut butter?

The problem with nut spreads in particular, is that they are sticky, stay on fingers and can be smeared on the student eating it, around their classroom and on the play equipment. During food preparation in the canteen, there is a real risk of double dipping knives into butter/margarine tubs and other cross contamination. It is best that peanut butter and other nut spreads are removed from the canteen to avoid mistakes being made. One needs to consider that parent volunteers with no training in the service of food, often help in school canteens.

What about removal of other nut containing products?

Many schools choose not to allow foods containing peanut or tree nuts as an ingredient because there are many choices of foods that don’t contain peanut and tree nuts. However, canteens cannot remove all food allergens from the canteen. Foods such as cow’s milk, wheat and eggs provide important nutrients for children and growing teens and cannot be removed from the canteen. Therefore, good, manageable risk minimisation strategies within the canteen and across the school should be in place.

Is peanut allergy more severe than other food allergies?

No. Allergies to any food allergen can be severe. Whilst peanut or tree nut allergies are the most common causes of deaths from food allergy, some young people have lost their life or had life-threatening allergic reactions to cow’s milk, egg, sesame and other food allergens.