

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROCEDURES

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Effective	Nov. 2007
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Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Subject:	STUDENTS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES
For Action By:	PRINCIPALS, FOOD SERVICE MANAGERS
Refer Questions to:	FOOD SERVICE ADMINISTRATORS, DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND NUTRITION

Responsibility

The Food Service Manager must be made aware, by School Administration, of any student that has a food allergy, the severity of that food allergy, symptoms of an allergic reaction and how that child should be treated for an allergic reaction. If the Food Service Manager is informed by a parent that their child has food allergies the manager should make sure that the parent has informed the School Administration, and that the school Administration is responsible for the collection and processing of the applicable district required documentation regarding emergency orders and authorization for rescue medication depending on the severity of a potential food reaction.

If a child with a documented food allergy, per School Administration, is going to be purchasing lunch from the school cafeteria, the child must have a Diet Prescription for Meals at School [FM-5425](#) form completed and signed by a licensed physician.

Information

Food allergies can be life threatening. True food allergies involve the immune system and occur when the body mistakenly interprets something in a food or a food ingredient as an invader and produces antibodies to fight it.

Food allergy symptoms can range from mild (such as an itchy mouth, an itchy tongue, or hives) to severe (shock or cardiac arrest). The most severe food allergy reaction is called anaphylaxis. Difficulty breathing, throat constriction, decreased blood pressure and unconsciousness may occur almost simultaneously. Anaphylaxis progresses quickly, and treatment usually includes an injection of epinephrine.

There are eight major food allergens, including milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (such as walnuts and almonds), soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. These eight foods are the most common food allergens and cause more than 90 percent of all food allergic reactions. A student with a food allergy can sometimes have an allergic reaction to a food without ingesting it. For example, skin contact with food particles on a table might cause an allergic reaction.

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STUDENTS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES (continued)

Suggestions for School Administration for managing food allergic children

While you might be tempted to ban allergenic foods from your school, this is not effective or practical. If a school instituted a ban on food allergens it would be very difficult to enforce. Even bans do not render an allergic child's environment absolutely safe. It may in fact create a false sense of security for the allergic child and school staff, which can potentially lead to serious injury or death. Better solutions include:

- Establishing lunch tables that are free of allergenic foods. Allergic students can still enjoy sitting with their friends who have "safe" (allergen free) lunches.
- Prohibiting lunch swapping
- Designating a person to be responsible for ensuring that lunch tables and surrounding areas are thoroughly cleaned before and after lunch. Use a designated sponge or cleaning cloth for the allergy-free tables to avoid cross contact.
- Encouraging students and staff to wash their hands with soap and water before and after handling food.

Meal service in the school cafeteria for a child with food allergies

Eating in the school cafeteria is often stressful for students with food allergies. Hidden ingredients and cross contact between foods are often cause for concern. Serving meals to a child with food allergies can be just as stressful to the cafeteria staff. The following are some guidelines for meal service to a child with food allergies:

- Make certain School Administration has been informed and has completed the necessary documents for a child with a food allergy.
- Make sure the student's physician has completed the [FM-5425](#) Diet Prescription for Meals at School so you know what foods need to be avoided and what substitute foods can be used.
- Develop a system for checking ingredient labels carefully for every food item to be served to the student with the allergy.
- Designate an area in the kitchen where allergy-free meals can be prepared. This area should be a "safe zone" and kept free of ingredients allergic students should avoid.
- Use separate utensils when preparing allergy-free foods.

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It is difficult to achieve complete avoidance of all allergenic foods because there can be hidden or accidentally introduced sources. School administration should ensure that the food service staff is informed of, and familiar with, emergency medical treatment for a child having an allergic reaction. If the school does not have a nurse, and an epi pen is required for severe food allergy, the outreach team of the school health program will train the school staff on the use of the epi pen. A school can reach the outreach team by calling M-DCPS Comprehensive Health Services at 305-995-1235.