



Be Allergy Safe

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy occurs when the body mistakes a particular food (called an allergen) as harmful. An allergic reaction is the body's immune system fighting back. A severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis, which can happen quickly and be life-threatening.

Although childcare facilities cannot be food allergen free, they can aim to be allergy safe. An allergy safe childcare facility must ensure the following:



- Each child with a food allergy has a care plan that facility staff and the child's parent have developed together.
- The care plan includes an anaphylaxis emergency plan in case of an accidental exposure to a food that causes a severe allergic reaction.
- The child can avoid the food that causes an allergic reaction.
- All staff understands the child's allergy and they are trained to deal with an allergic reaction if one occurs.

What are the symptoms of a severe allergic reaction?

Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis can vary and include any of the following:

- **Skin:** hives, swelling (including throat, tongue, lips or eyes), itching, warmth, redness, rash, pale skin or blue colour
- **Breathing:** wheezing, trouble breathing, cough, change of voice, throat tightness or chest tightness
- **Stomach:** vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain or diarrhea
- **Other:** weak pulse, feeling faint, trouble swallowing, runny nose and itchy watery eyes, sneezing, anxiety or headache

Symptoms can occur within minutes of eating or being exposed to the food, but they usually occur within two hours.



How do I treat a severe allergic reaction?



When a reaction begins, it is important to respond right away. A severe allergic reaction needs to be treated with a medication called epinephrine. Epinephrine helps reverse the symptoms of an allergic reaction and saves lives.

Steps for treating a severe allergic reaction include:

1. Inject epinephrine right away into the muscle of the outer thigh.
2. Call 911 or the local emergency number.
3. Have the child lie down, unless they are throwing up or having trouble breathing.
4. Do not leave the child alone.
5. Have another adult notify the parents.
6. A second dose of epinephrine can be given five to 15 minutes after the first dose, if symptoms do not get better or occur again.
7. The child must be taken to a hospital (sometimes a child has a second wave of symptoms). The hospital will observe the child for at least four hours to be sure he or she is OK and provide additional treatment if needed.

What training should early childhood educators have?

Staff need to have a valid CPR-C certificate, standard first aid training and be aware of how to treat a severe allergic reaction. Every child must have immediate access to a staff member with this training and knowledge.

Staff need to also receive additional training and know:

- Each child's allergy and how to help the child avoid the allergen.
- Signs and symptoms of a severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis.
- The child's care plan and anaphylaxis emergency plan and be able to access them.
- The location of and how to use the child's epinephrine auto-injector.
- To call 911 or local emergency number when signs of a severe allergic reaction occur and be able to communicate the health concern.





What steps can I take as an educator to create an allergy safe facility?

- Keep each child's care plan and anaphylaxis emergency plan handy, while respecting the child's privacy.
- Keep each child's stored auto-injectors in a secure unlocked place that is easy to access by all staff.
- Children with severe food allergy must not eat if their auto-injector(s) is/are not available. Contact parents to bring an auto-injector.
- Always supervise children while they are eating.
- Place dishes and utensils on a napkin, not directly on the table, when serving meals.
- Provide a specific eating area for young children with food allergies to minimize exposure to allergens. Ensure children are still included in the group.
- Remind children to not share food, utensils or food containers.
- Store food out of reach of young children.
- Talk to parents about activities that involve food, such as field trips or celebrations.
- Parents need to approve all food offered to their children. If you are unsure whether a food is safe, do not offer it to the child. If needed, ask parents to bring in a substitute.
- Make sure all foods, packaged or prepared, and brought into the childcare centre have complete ingredient lists.
- When preparing food, prevent cross-contamination with allergens. Even a tiny amount of an allergen can cause an allergic reaction. Wash hands, utensils and surfaces fully in between preparing different food.
- Ensure that all children and staff wash their hands before and after eating to help avoid getting food on toys, clothing or other surfaces.
- Clean and sanitize tables and surfaces where children eat before and after eating.
- Ask parents, visitors and older children to help keep the facility allergy safe by washing their hands and not bringing food allergens into the centre.



EpiPen organization kits or starter kits can be ordered free online at www.epipen.ca

If you suspect a medicine, chemical or other substance has poisoned someone, call the Poison Control Centre, 911 or your local emergency number.

Adapted from Healthy After Schools