

Food allergies affect approximately 15 million Americans, including 6 million children.

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food the body mistakenly believes is harmful.

When a person with food allergy eats the food, his or her immune system releases massive amounts of chemicals, including histamine, that trigger a cascade of symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, the gastrointestinal tract, the skin, and/or the cardiovascular system.

There is no cure for food allergies.

The prevalence of food allergies appears to be increasing among children under the age of 18, that is 2 students in every classroom.

Managing a food allergy on a daily basis involves constant vigilance.

Trace amounts of an allergen can trigger an allergic reaction in some individuals.

Unfortunately, food allergy deaths do occur, even among persons with a history of mild reactions in the past.

9-1-1 must ALWAYS be called with every anaphylactic reaction.

Anaphylaxis

What is anaphylaxis?

- Anaphylaxis is an immediate, intense and often life-threatening allergic reaction. Also known as anaphylactic shock, anaphylaxis is an excessive reaction by the body to combat a foreign substance that has been ingested, injected, inhaled or absorbed through the skin.
- When the body detects a foreign substance, the immune system responds by producing antibodies – proteins created by white blood cells to fight foreign substances. These antibodies attack the substance, but also cause cells to release potentially harmful chemicals.
- Common allergic reactions such as, difficulty breathing, itching, rashes and low blood pressure are the result of these chemicals. Anaphylaxis is a “worst case”, severe, allergic reaction. The drastic changes in blood circulation and lung function are similar to those experienced in shock. As with shock, they are life-threatening and must be treated immediately.

Signs and symptoms

- The symptoms of anaphylaxis can vary. Initial signs of an anaphylactic episode can be mild - a skin rash or a nondescript “strange feeling.” These symptoms can rapidly progress to include difficulty breathing, swelling, dizziness or unconsciousness.

Serious symptoms:

- Skin: Widespread hives, flushing or swelling.
- Mouth: Swelling of the tongue.
- Throat: Itching, tightness, hoarseness. A hacking cough.
- Stomach: Vomiting, nausea, cramps, diarrhea.
- Lungs: Repetitive coughing, wheezing, trouble breathing.
- Heart: Rapid heart rate, lightheadedness, dizziness, loss of consciousness.

Emergency treatment

- Epinephrine is the most commonly used emergency treatment for anaphylaxis. The EpiPen™ is an example of an easy, user-friendly device for the injection of epinephrine. Epinephrine quickly widens air passages to make breathing easier. It also constricts blood vessels and raises blood pressure. When administered as early as possible, it is very effective. Allergic reactions usually improve within seconds after the injection. Even so, epinephrine's effects are short-lived.
- In all allergic reaction cases, emergency medical services (9-1-1) must be contacted. Besides transport to the hospital, they might also administer intravenous fluids, oxygen or other treatments. Occasionally, these patients stay overnight at the hospital.

Managing your child's allergic reactions

- Work with an allergy specialist to identify what triggers your child's allergic reaction. The specialist can help you develop strategies to avoid future allergic reactions.
- Alert all of the appropriate school officials at your child's school and fill out the necessary forms as soon as possible.
- Develop an emergency plan with your physician and share that plan with all those who have contact with your child.
- Always have emergency medications available for your child, and train caregivers to properly administer your child's medication.
- Have your child wear a medical bracelet indicating anaphylactic triggers. These bracelets provide life-saving information to caregivers, emergency crews and hospital staff

A Food Allergy is NOT:

A food intolerance (lactose intolerance, gluten intolerance, etc.).

- An intolerance does not involve the immune system – it involves the digestive system because the body lacks an enzyme needed to digest and process a particular food.
- Symptoms of an intolerance include gas, bloating, and abdominal pain.

A food preference (vegetarian, kosher, etc.).

- If your family or your child has a food preference such as vegetarian or religious needs, please contact your school cafeteria manager to see how we can best fit their needs.

Celiac Disease (is a NON-IgE mediated food allergy).

- Celiac Disease is still a life threatening disease. While it is not considered a food allergy, a strict gluten free diet must be followed. If your child has Celiac Disease, please contact the District Nurse and the Nutritionist immediately.

TOP EIGHT ALLERGENS

Eight foods account for 90 percent of all food allergy reactions:

- Peanuts*
- Tree nuts (cashews, pecans, walnuts, etc.)
- Milk
- Egg
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish (halibut, salmon, etc.)
- Shellfish (crab, lobster, shrimp, etc.)
- However, almost any food can cause a reaction.

To learn more about food allergy, we recommend the video “Understanding Food Allergy” by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

*School Cafeterias in Laveen Elementary School District are all peanut-free facilities.