

## Allergy Aware Canteens

### *What is allergy?*

Allergy occurs when a person's immune system reacts to substances in the environment that are harmless for most people. These substances are known as allergens and are found in house dust mites, pets, pollen, insect venoms, moulds, foods and some medicines.

### *What is anaphylaxis?*

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening. It must be treated as a medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment with adrenaline usually via an adrenaline autoinjector (such as EpiPen®) and urgent medical treatment. Anaphylaxis usually occurs within 20 minutes, up to 2 hours of exposure to the trigger and can rapidly become life threatening.

### *What are the symptoms?*

Symptoms range from mild to severe, for example: hives; swelling of the lips, face, eyes, tongue; vomiting and/or abdominal pain; persistent cough and/or hoarse voice; breathing difficulty; persistent dizziness or sudden collapse.

### *What are the most common food allergens?*

- eggs
- milk
- peanut
- tree nuts (e.g. cashew, walnut, pistachio, hazelnut)
- lupin
- fish
- shellfish (e.g. prawn, lobster)
- sesame
- soy
- wheat

### *What are the treatment options?*

Currently, there is no cure for food allergy. Avoidance of the food is the only way to prevent an allergic reaction. Adrenaline is the first line of treatment for anaphylaxis and can be administered via an adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen®). People who have an adrenaline autoinjector should also have an ASCIA Action Plan which identifies their allergies and how and when to give the adrenaline autoinjector.

### *What does 'may contain' mean?*

'May contain' statements on a food label 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 food allergens (listed above) the food should not be consumed by the person with an allergy to the food allergen. For example, a product with 'may contain traces of nuts' should not be given to a peanut or tree nut allergic child.

### *Does cooking remove the allergen?*

No. However, some children with egg and milk allergy are able to tolerate cooked egg or cooked milk. However this must be confirmed by the child's allergist.

### *More information*

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia [www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

### *Food allergy and the canteen*

Everyone working in food service, from the manager through to the food preparation and service staff, needs to be aware of the risks food allergies pose. It's also important to be clear on how to identify and manage food allergens and how to respond to enquiries from customers with food allergies.

National Allergy Strategy (NAS) provides an overarching framework that aims to improve the health and quality of life of Australians with allergic diseases, and minimise the burden of allergic diseases on individuals, their carers, healthcare services and the community.

FOCiS is a member of the NAS Food Service & Food Industry working group who contributed to the development of **All about Allergens** training for people working in food service. The comprehensive training program details need to know information relevant to those in the food service industry and is presented using videos and interactive activities. The course takes about 60-90 minutes to complete and a certificate can be printed on completion. Access the course at: [www.foodallergytraining.com.au](http://www.foodallergytraining.com.au)

### *Identify and manage food allergens in the school canteen*

When you are preparing food, you must be able to identify the foods and ingredients used at all stages of the cooking process. Encourage parents or guardians of children with allergy to visit the canteen to view products available.

#### **IDENTIFY:**

- Use reputable suppliers and check deliveries to ensure you received what you ordered
- Ensure all products are clearly labeled and keep ingredients in original containers where possible or keep a copy of the ingredients list with the food
- Ensure your staff use the correct recipe and product specifications every time
- Avoid substituting ingredients as they may have different compositions
- Ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of and can identify all students with allergies
- Keep all allergen information up to date
- Have a procedure in place for when ingredients or recipes change.

#### **MANAGE:**

- Prevent cross contamination by following good personal hygiene and cleaning practices
- Train staff and volunteers to take food allergy seriously, and to know their responsibilities for providing information about food allergens and other substances; consider/restrict who serves children with food allergy when they go to the canteen
- Ensure food packaging is safe and delivered in a clean condition
- Consider separate areas for preparation, display and serving of allergy free foods
- Students with food allergy should have distinguishable lunch order bags
- Discuss the possibility of photos of the children with food allergy being placed in the canteen.

### **Food bans are not the answer!**

According to Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia bans can lull parents, students and staff into a false sense of security believing that risk is removed or minimal because the food is banned. It is important there is greater emphasis on the many strategies to manage risk than a belief that a food is successfully banned.

Many schools call themselves 'nut free or peanut free'. We discourage bans and use of these terms. The preferred term is for schools to be '**allergy aware**'.