

**School Activities
and Food Allergens
Resource Document**

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The following sections are designed to provide awareness as to how food allergens may turn up in craft activities, science and social studies projects, field trips and other school activities.

It is not possible to list all of the ways allergens may turn up in schools but the information outlined in this document can help create awareness and provide an opportunity to explore alternatives.

Communication with parents and/or students and being proactive in the planning and preparation of school activities can allow school personnel to address the individual nature of each student's *triggers* for anaphylaxis, allergy and asthma.

This material has been provided by the Allergy/Asthma Information Association.

School Craft Activities and Food Allergens

The following are some examples of craft activities that could pose a risk to students with the following life-threatening food allergies.

Egg Allergy

- Using egg cartons in crafts
- Coloring or decorating Easter eggs. Plastic eggs could be substituted and covered with tissue paper and diluted glue (decoupage). This would also create a more lasting craft. Wooden eggs are an option but may be expensive.
- Using crushed egg shells to cover a bottle (e.g., making a vase)
- Egg shell mosaic (crushed eggshells are dried and used to make mosaic pictures)
- Crushed egg shells are sometimes used in paint to give it a crackle effect
- Making Christmas cookie ornaments and brushing with egg white to glaze
- Using dried fruit in wreaths and ornaments and brushing with egg white to keep from going brown
- Eggs are blown out and brought to class or this is done in the class
- Sugar cookies may be decorated with a mixture of food coloring and egg yolk
- Easter egg hunts (use plastic eggs instead of real eggs).
- Egg white icing for gingerbread houses
- Homemade playdough recipes
- Some tempera paints may contain egg. The old technique for making tempera paints uses egg. The powdered paint used in elementary schools may not.
- The egg and spoon race is a potential risk for students with egg allergy (golf balls may be substituted for eggs).

Milk Allergy

- Making bird houses out of milk cartons
- Used popsicle sticks could be contaminated with milk
- Blowing bubbles in chocolate milk until it overflows over the glass onto the paper to make designs
- Taking a bucket of milk, adding food coloring and “swooshing” paper through for a neat design

Peanut and/or Nut Allergy

- Crafts using bird seed can pose a risk of peanut/nut exposure
- Pine cone bird feeders covered with peanut butter so that dried fruit, etc. will stick to it.
- Mesh plastic bags that house shelled peanuts are often used in crafts
- Used popsicle sticks may be contaminated with peanut or nut
- Using nuts in making wreaths
- Candies used to decorate gingerbread houses may contain peanuts (e.g. M&M’s)
- Halves of walnut shells are often used to make Christmas tree ornaments. Use small sea shells instead. They can be purchased at craft or dollar stores or gathered at the beach.
- Peanut butter playdough
- Making bean bags
- Acorns and walnuts are sometimes used in collage activities

Wheat Allergy

- Using wheat in making wreath decorations

Science Projects and Food Allergens

The following are some examples of science projects that could pose a risk to students with the following life-threatening food allergies.

Egg Allergy

- Egg flotation to demonstrate buoyancy
- Demonstrating how an egg can be sucked into a bottle by creating a vacuum
- Make an egg go soft via immersion in vinegar
- Packing eggs so they will not break when dropped from heights to see the effect of force of gravity
- Bringing in an incubator and hatching baby chicks

Peanut/Nut Allergy

- Celebrate a legume day. Peanuts along with other legumes are brought in to study (note that peanuts are a legume).
- Burning a peanut to demonstrate heat producing substances (Diffusion – Grade 9)
- Collections of seeds. Ensure peanuts and nuts are not included in this if there are students with these allergies.

Other

- Tasting and/or sniffing white powders to determine their identity. Allergic students should not be required to participate.
- Avoid using latex balloons or other latex products in class **IF** you have students with latex allergy

Social Studies Projects and Food Allergens

The following are some examples of social studies projects that could pose a risk to students with life-threatening food allergies.

- Tasting foods from around the world. Food allergens should not be permitted in the classroom. Note that foreign foods may use peanut oil in cooking as well as other nuts, shellfish, fish and egg.
- Visiting ethnic restaurants to sample various foods. It is very difficult to fully ascertain ingredients in these restaurants and food may be cross-contaminated. Food allergic students should not be required to participate.

Field trips and Food Allergens

The following are some examples of school field trips that could pose a risk to students with food allergies such as egg, dairy, peanut/nut, wheat or fish. Many situations can be avoided by planning ahead and being prepared for the unexpected.

- A visit to a farm and a young egg allergic student is handed an egg
- Touring a bakery, restaurant or grocery store – many food allergens present
- A visit to a farm and milk allergic students are shown cows being milked
- Students are singing at a senior's home and the residents serve peanut butter cookies to the students (consider that cookies may also contain egg, wheat or dairy **IF** either of those are a problem for any students in attendance).
- Many field trips include handing out goodies at the end that may contain student allergens.
- Zoos and animal parks can expose children to food allergens (e.g. nuts) and asthma triggers.
- Sports activities (many peanuts/nuts are consumed in arenas and playing fields)
- Water parks or the beach – where will the single dose, single-use auto-injectors (e.g., EpiPen) be kept. They must not be left sitting in the sun or stored in vehicle glove compartments. Heat will affect the medication.
- Hand wipes are needed as well as allergen-safe lunches. There may not be sinks to wash hands.
- When planning a trip to a fish hatchery, are there students who are allergic to fish.
- Track and field or sports trips – where will the students be eating and where will the auto-injectors be kept.
- Skiing trips – Single dose, single-use auto-injectors must not freeze as that could cause the injector to malfunction.
- Traveling long distances on school buses where students are eating on the bus. Classmates should not for example, bring peanut/nut products on a bus trip when there is a student with these allergies. Also consider other life-threatening allergies and ask students not to bring foods containing those allergens. It is helpful if school staff pack juice boxes, water and allergy friendly snacks.
- On out-of-town field trips be prepared in case the school bus breaks down, or the possibility of delays in airports. Allergic students should carry extra safe non-perishable food. They may not be able to safely eat at a restaurant, fast food outlet or corner store.
- School-wide picnics at city parks. Plan how will you monitor the whereabouts of allergic students and where the single dose, single-use auto-injectors will be kept.
- Some field trips may also present problems for children with asthma, i.e. a hay maze, petting zoo, farm. Talking with parents of the anaphylactic student ahead of time can help ensure the student takes asthma medication along.
- Visiting a chocolate or candy factory may expose allergic students to nuts, peanuts, milk, egg (cream centres in chocolates) or wheat.
- Restaurants can pose risk for allergic students. Parental input of allergy friendly chain restaurants can help reduce risks.

Cooking / Other School Activities and Food Allergens

The following are some examples of cooking and other school activities that can pose a risk to students with life-threatening food allergies.

- On school treat days donuts are handed out to everyone. This poses a potential risk to the egg, milk, wheat and peanut/nut allergic students.
- Making ice cream in class poses a risk for the milk and egg allergic students
- Showing students how to make butter by shaking whipping cream in a jar – a risk for the dairy allergic student
- Fundraisers can have craft items and food items that pose risks for nut/milk/egg/ wheat allergic students
- Garbage / recycling duty: allergic students should not pick up food wrappers or containers, and should be assigned other safer tasks
- Advent calendars with chocolate and/or candies inside could be a risk for the peanut/nut, egg and milk allergic students. Try using little boxes of allergen-safe *Smarties*® (if students only have peanut/nut allergy) or give bookmarks, pencils or stickers instead. Another alternative is to use advent calendars that have little verses to be read each day.
- Food treats should not be handed out in the class when there are food allergic students. Bulk food items are high risk because there are no ingredient lists and there is a high risk of cross-contamination with food allergens.
- In creating allergy aware schools, safe snack choices might include popcorn, pretzels, vegetables or fruit rather than peanuts and nuts
- Home Economics or food classes present numerous challenges for those with food allergies. Even if avoided in one class, there is a risk of cross-contamination if the student's food allergens are used in other classes that use the same room and same cooking utensils, dishes, dish cloths and cutting boards, etc. Substitutes for food allergens like egg, milk and wheat can be used **IF** you have a student or students with these allergies. Allergen-free cookbooks are available. Peanuts and nuts can be eliminated from most recipes and there are many recipes available that do not require these ingredients. Having a set of pans and utensils, etc. that is never used for foods containing the allergens of concern helps reduce risk.
- Food allergic students should not be pressured to try any food they are uncomfortable with or unsure of

Source: Allergy/Asthma Information Association