Managing Food Allergies: Child Care Centers

1. Create a food allergy policy for your center.
   • Form a food allergy team to write a food allergy policy.
   • Develop an emergency plan specifically for your center(s).
   • Notify parents about any reactions or exposures to an allergen.
   • If outside foods are allowed, limit to pre-packaged foods with complete ingredient lists.
   • Check all food labels for allergens.
   • Require all children to wash their hands when entering the center and before and after meals and snacks to prevent cross contact.
   • Keep information about children with food allergies confidential.

2. Create an individual food allergy plan for each child with a food allergy.
   • Obtain completed medical statement from parents/guardians (forms available from your sponsoring organization). Talk with parents/guardians if you need clarification.
   • Work with parents to create a plan to treat a reaction if it occurs.
   • Keep the plan where you can refer to it as needed.
   • Obtain any necessary medications from parents. Be sure you understand when and how to give each medication.
   • Keep medications in a location that is secure, but accessible in an emergency.
   • Work with parents to create an affordable plan using the menus and resources that you have.

3. Take actions to avoid exposure to food allergens.
   • Wash hands with soap and water before and after each task. Using water alone or hand sanitizer alone does not remove food allergens.
   • Wash, rinse, and sanitize all utensils and cookware after each use.
   • Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces before and after each use.
   • Use designated cutting boards and designated work areas to prepare food for children with food allergies.
   • Store foods so that allergy-safe foods do not come in contact with other foods.
   • Clean and sanitize tables and chairs before and after meals and snacks.
   • Create a way for staff to be able to identify children with food allergies.
   • Prevent trading or sharing food, food utensils, or food containers.
   • Avoid foods that a child is allergic to in art projects or cooking activities.
   • Limit food to specific areas in the center.
   • Ask parents to approve items such as body lotions, sunscreens, shampoos, and creams, as some may contain allergenic ingredients that could be ingested.

4. Train staff about food allergies.
   • Train staff on the center’s food allergy policy and each child’s individual food allergy plan.
   • Train staff on symptoms of an allergic reaction.
   • Instruct staff on when and how to give medications.
   • Ensure confidentiality of children’s medical information.
5. Train staff to read food labels for allergens.
   • Most food labels list the major eight food allergens using their common name (milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, soy, fish, and crustacean shellfish).
   • Check labels for warning statements such as “may contain,” “produced on shared equipment,” or “produced in a plant that uses.” These foods should not be served to children with allergies.
   • Check ingredient labels for allergens on every product each time food is purchased.