Managing Food Allergies in Family Child Care

In the United States, 1 in 13 children has a food allergy. One of the best ways to keep children safe in family child care settings is to create and implement a plan for managing food allergies. This plan should include ways to prevent exposures to allergens and steps for reacting to food allergy emergencies.

1. Create a food allergy policy.
   - Create a written food allergy policy with actions to take in case a child has an allergic reaction.
   - Have a plan for another adult to help in case of a medical emergency, such as an allergic reaction.
   - Obtain needed training to safely care for a child with food allergies, including topics on:
     - How to administer an epinephrine auto-injector
     - How to respond to a food allergy emergency
     - What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction
   - Write a policy for handling a suspected allergic reaction for a child without a known allergy.

2. Create an individual food allergy plan for each child with a food allergy.
   - Obtain a completed medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional (form available from sponsor).
     - Medical statement must provide information about which food(s) the child is allergic to and a plan of what to do if an allergic reaction occurs.
     - Talk with parents/guardians if clarification is needed about the completed forms.
   - Work with parents/guardians to create a plan to treat a reaction based on the information in the medical statement.
   - Put the plan in writing for the parents/guardians to review.
• Keep the plan where it can be referred to easily, but also kept private such as in a binder or folder. Keep all information about a child with food allergies private.
• Obtain any needed medications from parents/guardians. It is important to understand when and how to give each medication. Get additional training to administer medication as needed.
• Keep medications in a location that is secure, but accessible in an emergency.
• Work with parents/guardians to create a plan using available resources.
• Notify parents/guardians about any reactions or exposures to an allergen.

3 Take actions to avoid exposure to food allergens.
• Inform other family members that may have access to food and food contact surfaces in the house about the allergy issues.
• Limit food to specific areas in the house.

**Handwashing**

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after each task. Using water alone or hand sanitizer alone does not remove allergens.
- Require all children to wash their hands when entering your home, and before and after meals and snacks.
- Hang handwashing posters that are age-appropriate for children to learn how to properly wash their hands.

**Wash, rinse, and sanitize**

- Wash all utensils and cookware before and after each use.
- Wash all food contact surfaces like counters before and after each use.
- Clean tables and chairs before and after meals and snacks.
- Clean toys, objects, and other items that a young child may put in their mouth.
Safely store and prepare allergen-free foods

- Choose allergen-free foods if possible, when planning weekly menus.
- Store foods so that allergy-safe foods and ingredients do not come in contact with other foods.
- Use designated cutting boards and designated work areas to prepare food for children with food allergies if possible. Otherwise, prepare allergy-safe food first.
- Cover and label allergen-free food after preparation. Store away from allergen-containing food.

Monitor children

- Serve the children with food allergies first if doing family style dining. Ensure that they do not take a food item to which they are allergic.
- Prevent trading or sharing of food, food utensils, or food containers.
- Prevent children from using the same utensils for different foods in family style dining.
- Prevent children from leaving the table with food or beverages.

Food allergies in non-food items

- Avoid foods that a child is allergic to in art projects, lesson plans, or cooking activities.
- Ask parents/guardians to approve of items such as body lotions, sunscreens, soaps, and creams as these may contain allergenic ingredients that could be ingested.
Know how to read ingredient lists on food labels for allergens.

- Check the ingredient list for allergens on every product each time the product is purchased.
  - Ingredient lists in the United States are required by the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA) to list the eight major food allergens that cause allergic reactions in plain language on the food label: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, soy, fish, and crustacean shellfish.
  - In 2021, the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act (FASTER) was passed into law. This act adds sesame as a major allergen but will not take effect until January 2023. Manufacturers may begin incorporating sesame as a major allergen on their food label before this date. Contact the food manufacturer if there is any uncertainty about a food containing sesame.
  - Carefully read ingredient lists for products made outside of the United States, as they are not required to follow United States food allergen labeling laws.
- Check ingredient list for advisory statements such as “may contain,” “produced on shared equipment,” or “produced in a plant that uses.” Do not give foods with these labels to children with food allergies.
- When the label is unclear, call the food manufacturer.
- If outside foods are allowed, limit them to pre-packaged foods with complete ingredient lists or whole foods such as fruits and vegetables.
References

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For More Information

American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology
www.aaaai.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

Food Allergy Research & Education
www.foodallergy.org

Food and Nutrition Information Center
www.nal.usda.gov

Food Insight (website sponsored by International Food Information Council Foundation)
www.foodinsight.org

Institute of Child Nutrition
www.theicn.org/foodsafety

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
www.niaid.nih.gov

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education
https://nrckids.org/

U.S. Department of Agriculture
www.usda.gov

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