



Food Allergies: What PTOs and PTAs Need to Know

Food Allergy Tips for Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)

Today, one in 13 children has food allergies, and nearly 40 percent of these children have experienced a severe or life-threatening reaction. Many of these reactions happen at school. Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) are a vital part of the school community, providing an organized family and community component. As a PTO or PTA leader, you can be a powerful voice for your children and other children, advocating for their health, safety, education and overall well-being.

Children with food allergies need your support to ensure their safety and inclusion. From classroom parties, to school family nights, to after-school fundraisers, keep in mind that all students in the community should be able to participate safely.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published National Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools, available at www.foodallergy.org/CDC. The recommendations below are a few examples of recommended practices to help ensure students with food allergies are safely included. We encourage you to review the complete list of the CDC's Recommended Practices, on pages 41–43 of the guidelines available at www.foodallergy.org/CDC.

- Avoid the use of identified allergens in class parties, holidays, celebrations, crafts, snacks or rewards.
- Use non-food incentives for prizes, gifts, awards, and fundraisers.
- When possible, avoid ordering foods from restaurants because food allergens may be present, but unrecognized. Have ingredient information readily available for all pre-packaged and/or catered food items.
- Do not exclude children with food allergies from events or extra-curricular activities.
- Make sure that food allergy policies and practices address foods available during fundraisers, class parties, at athletic events and during after-school programs.
- Have rapid access to epinephrine auto-injectors in cases of emergency and train staff to use them.

Did you know?

Food allergies may constitute a disability under the law. Children with food allergies are entitled to an equal opportunity to participate in all school programs and events including extra-curricular activities. This usually applies to activities held by groups such as PTOs and PTAs. (See Section 5 of the CDC guidelines for more information on federal laws that pertain to food allergies.)

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care Programs*. 2013.

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan by Food Allergy Research & Education

www.foodallergy.org/document.doc?id=234

Protecting Students with Disabilities—Guidance from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html

U.S. Department of Education "Dear Colleague Letter"—School obligations under Section 504

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201301-504.html

