

Planning *for* School: A Parent's Guide



Planning is essential when preparing your food-allergic child for school, so we have compiled tips and resources to support you in creating a safe and healthy environment for your child while he or she is in the care of others. Work with your doctor to provide accurate and specific medical instructions to be shared with your child's school as well.

Educate to Empower!

- Study current food allergy education and share this information with your child's school.
- When discussing food allergies, use documented facts, research studies, and proven cases to advocate on behalf of your child.
- Parents need to know how to effectively communicate information about food allergies and their child's needs. It is important to develop the confidence and knowledge needed to be an effective advocate for yourself and for your child. Your efforts will also teach your child to become his or her own best advocate!

Visit [FAACT's Education Resource Center](#) to access the most current food allergy resources and tools.

[FAACT's Food Allergy Basics Section](#)

FAACT School Tips

- Empower school administrators, teachers, your child's classmates, and your child by praising efforts often.
- Plan well in advance. Some private and public schools require a family to be placed on a wait list.
- Prior to the start of the school year, call the school and request forms needed to have medications available for your child. Ask for any other medical forms your child may need, including: [AAP's Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan](#).
- Have your allergist fill out and sign your child's emergency action care plan. We suggest printing the plan on brightly colored paper, so it stands out. Be sure to give all caregivers a copy of the plan and attach a photo of your child to each copy.
- Provide your school with two (2) non-expired, prescribed epinephrine auto-injector devices and other necessary medications as required. Return all required paperwork to the school in a timely manner.
- Educate yourself on 504s and other healthcare plans that may be available for your child. Schedule a meeting with your child's school nurse to discuss these options and be sure to visit [FAACT's Civil Rights Advocacy](#) section for additional information.

Communicating *with* School Personnel

Your goal is to create an effective team. A positive attitude and an open mind will demonstrate your willingness to assist teachers and others who care for your child in a non-conflicting manner. In turn, educators will find comfort in knowing they can turn to you with questions and concerns they may have about the well-being of your child.



- Document discussions with school staff and decisions made about your child’s management plan. People present during these discussions should include the principal and all individuals who have contact with your child during the day (e.g., the school nurse, physical education, music, and art teachers; bus drivers; lunchroom personnel; etc.). This allows everyone the opportunity to learn about food allergies, practice with prescribed auto-injectable devices, and ask questions.
- If you are planning to hand out material in meetings with school staff, keep it short and informative. Refer school personnel to [FAACT’s School Personnel](#) section for support, resources, and **FREE** downloads.
- Include your contact information on all materials provided to school staff in case someone needs to contact you for additional information during the school year.
- Encourage school staff to practice emergency action plans, just as they would practice a fire drill. This will build confidence among staff and help ensure swift action takes place in the event of an emergency. Some schools may already have a food allergy policy in place. Be sure to review the policy with your medical provider and make suggestions for your child, as necessary.
- Discuss “what ifs” and plan for unexpected situations to ensure everyone is confident in their ability to handle any type of emergency throughout the day.
 - What if a reaction happens during an after-school program?
 - What if a reaction occurs on the playground?
 - What if a reaction occurs when a substitute teacher is leading the class?
 - What happens if a reaction occurs on the school bus?
- During the meeting with school personnel, the nurse should demonstrate how to use your child’s prescribed epinephrine auto-injector, or you can do this. Practicing use of your child’s epinephrine trainer will build confidence among caregivers and will help ensure prompt action in emergency situations.
- Having an education advocate sometimes helps to open lines of communication and address areas of concern in discussing 504 and other health plans that may otherwise not have been addressed in initial meetings.
- Find out the school’s policy and plans for storage and accessibility to your child’s epinephrine devices. Provide your school with information on the importance of epinephrine in food allergy emergencies. Topics to cover include:
 - Temperature control
 - Strategic placement
 - Training on use
 - Importance
 - Multiple doses available should a second dose be needed
 - Expiration dates

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- Delay in treatment with epinephrine increases the chance for fatality.
- At the minimum, schools should have an [AAP Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan](#) and two (2) epinephrine auto-injector devices readily accessible and in place for each student identified with a food allergy.
- All 50 states now have laws in place protecting students' rights to carry and use asthma and anaphylaxis medications at school.
- Review meal plans with the school's food service director if your child will be eating lunch at school. Schedule a meeting to discuss label reading, cross-contact, etc.



o [FAACT's Food Services Section](#)

- Review school policies involving food used in curriculums and other school activities:
 - o How are snack times handled?
 - o How are birthdays celebrated?
 - o How far in advance will parents of food-allergic students be notified of any food celebrations, etc.?
 - o Are teachers allowed to eat food in the classroom?
- Is your child's classroom or school nut-free? If so, what policy is in place that permits the class or school to be titled "nut-free" or "allergen-free"? How is the policy enforced?
- Request that each month the teacher's plans for activities that involve food are available for review.
- How are field trips handled? Visit [FAACT's Field Trips, for parents and schools](#)
- Discuss school bus policies. [FAACT's Bus Drivers and Transportation Personnel, for parents and schools](#)
- Ensure your child has been informed of need-to-know information and his or her responsibilities. Be sure all parties are available to address any questions and concerns your child may have and to reassure him or her.
 - o Will your child give a special signal to alert the teacher that he or she might be having a reaction?
 - o What will your child do if it happens on the playground or in the cafeteria?
 - o Practice drills with your child to build confidence.
 - o Tell your child where medications will be stored at school and who will have access to them.
 - o Explain snack time and role-play situations that could occur while in school.
 - o Create a no-food-trading rule with your child.
 - o Encourage and teach label reading.
 - o Practice emergency procedures.
 - o Practice administering epinephrine with your epinephrine-training device.
 - o Encourage your child to wear his or her [medical alert jewelry](#).
- Involve your child's classmates and provide education as needed.
- Provide food allergy books, coloring pages, activities, and stickers for your child's class to use (as appropriate based on your child's age).

Information to Share with Teachers and School Personnel



Planning, education, and creating a supportive team for your child early on will ensure a safe and healthy school year ahead.

The documents below contain tips and resources to support you in working with your child's school. Download the guides and be sure to visit the [FAACT's Education Downloads](#) section for additional resources and posters.

- [FAACT's Food Allergy Curricula Program for Schools](#)
- ['FAACTs for Schools' Staff Education Program](#)
- [FAACT's School Lunchroom Poster](#)
- [Food Allergy School Letter to Parents \(Sample Template\)](#)
- [Food Allergy Safety - It's A Matter of FAACT!](#)
- Visit [FAACT's Education Resource Center](#) for additional information, resources, and downloads.
- Visit FAACT's Civil Rights Advocacy Resource Center for additional information about school plans and accommodations.
- Share information about FAACT and any local food allergy support groups in your area.
- Share the following guidelines with your school:
 - o [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\) Voluntarily Food Allergy Guidelines](#)
 - o [Food Allergy Management & Education \(FAME\) Toolkit](#)

Planning *for* Preschool



Preparing your child for preschool should be a rewarding and exciting time. However, families of children who have food allergies often find this time stressful. With proper planning, education, and a supportive team, the risk for students at this age can be reduced.

Preparation

Preparation should begin well in advance of the child entering a daycare center, or preschool, and parents should do their homework, when looking into both private, and public schools.

- Research several preschools for food allergy management policies or guidelines. Compare these policies and/or guidelines with other guidelines, such as the [CDC's Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergy](#) found in the [FAACT's Education Download](#) section.
- Research the preschool's environment:
 - Visit the preschool's website
 - Talk to your neighbors
 - Go to community functions and ask other parents their input
 - Participate in any "open house" events
 - Schedule a tour of the school
- When visiting centers or schools, be sure to ask questions and keep notes to compare with other schools.
 - Parents may refer their child to be evaluated for a [\[Section 504 plan\]](#)* or [\[Individual Education Plan \(IEP\)\]](#). For instructions on how to refer your child for a Section 504 Plan or an IEP, visit [FAACT's Civil Rights Advocacy](#) section.
 - Call the preschool to set up a meeting. Ideally, if your child is entering the preschool age, contacting the preschool at least 1-2 years prior, as there is possibly a wait list.
 - Does the school participate in a federally funded program?
- In choosing a preschool capable of accommodating your child's needs, look for knowledge and practices among caregivers that includes¹:
 - A general awareness of food allergies
 - Constant diligence in the management of food-allergic students
 - Careful label reading habits
 - Avoidance measures of offending foods, arts and crafts containing allergens, etc.
 - Procedures for preventing of cross-contact
 - A protocol for enacting emergency procedures
 - Confidence in administering epinephrine appropriately
 - Previous and ongoing training on food allergy management for caregivers

Discussion Topics

Other considerations in choosing a preschool or daycare should include:

- **Training:** What type of food allergy training is provided to staff, and how often? Is there a school or RN on site? Who delivers the training? Are staff trained on recognizing the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction and how to administer epinephrine?
- **Medications:** Where are emergency medications stored? Who will be administering medications? How are medications transported throughout the day (to the playground, lunchroom, etc.)? Do children self-carry their medications?
- **Shared space:** Private schools sometimes share space with a church. In this case, be sure to ask about activities that may take place when school is not in, and what measures are taken to ensure a safe and clean environment for when the child returns.
- **Meal Plans:** Some private schools require students to eat from a meal plan provided by the school. Are there exceptions for food allergic students? Can a meeting be arranged between parents and any meal service providers/catering companies to discuss the needs of food allergic students?
- **Safe snacks:** Where will “safe snacks” for food allergic students be stored? Is there a “no-nut” policy in place; and if so, how is it enforced? Is there a notification process for food being brought into the classroom?
- **Special Events:** How are class parties and special events handled? Are any PTA/PTO members trained on food allergies? How are field trips handled for food allergic students? How does the schoolwork with non-food allergic parents to ensure a safe classroom/environment for food allergic students (letters, presentations, email blasts, etc.)?
- **Cleaning Methods:** Children this age tend to constantly place their hands in their mouth, and some children will chew on toys or bed-rails. How often are toys and surfaces cleaned, and by what method? Is there a hand-washing procedure upon arrival to school and after meal/snack times?
- **Food Storage:** Is there an area where bottles (non-milk) and food (allergy-friendly) will be stored, to avoid confusion among caregivers during hectic feeding times?
- **Food Sharing:** What are the centers policies on food sharing? Seat placement during meal and snack times? Will there be designated staff member overseeing food allergic students?

Enrolling Your Child

Provide the preschool with the appropriate paperwork and other items required in a timely manner, replacing as needed throughout the school year.

- [Allergy and Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan](#), signed by your child’s physician
- Two (2), non-expired, auto-injection epinephrine devices
- Additional medications as required (antihistamines, inhalers, etc.)
- Emergency contact numbers
- Avoidance instructions for your child’s allergens i.e. “How to Read a Label”, etc.
- Safe snacks, etc.

Discuss our [Planning for School: A Parent’s Guide](#) with caregivers.

Planning *for* Elementary School



As you plan for your child's elementary school years, the same diligence and preparation is needed as in previous years, and additional factors for children this age will need to be taken into consideration. These factors include:

- The importance of food allergy management and the seriousness of food allergy reactions. [Planning for School: A Parent's Guide](#) should be reviewed by parents.
- Classroom food allergy rules need to be discussed with the student, who is now well on the way to becoming his or her own advocate.
- Review signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction with your child and how to inform an adult.
- Reassure your child where his or her medications will be stored and what steps will take place in an emergency.
- Review safety measures with your child, including:
 - Label reading
 - No food sharing
 - Hand washing
 - Water fountains
 - Arts and crafts
- Educate your child's classmates on basic food allergy information through:
 - Reading books with the class
 - Activities with the class
- Keep an eye out for social and emotional factors that may be effecting your child and assure his or her to share any instances of [bullying](#).

FAACT Thanks YOU!

Repetitive training, education, and awareness are vital in creating an allergy-aware facility! By educating yourself and others, not only are you becoming a better advocate for your child, but you are also laying a foundation for students who will follow in your child's footsteps.

Thank you for taking the time to review our resources.

We wish you a successful school year!

1 [Pediatrics. 2012 Jul](#);130(1):e25-32. doi: 10.1542/peds.2011-1762. Epub 2012 Jun 25.

Allergic reactions to foods in preschool-aged children in a prospective observational food allergy study., *Fleischer DM, Perry TT, Atkins D, Wood RA, Burks AW, Jones SM, Henning AK, Stablein D, Sampson HA, Sicherer SH.*