

HARFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy involves an interaction between food and the immune system. For some people a food protein may be recognized by the body's immune system as a foreign invader. The body responds and the person experiences an allergic reaction. The term "food allergy" should not be used for food dislikes or food intolerance, i.e. lactose intolerance. Between 1% and 2% of the school-age population have food allergies.

What foods most often cause allergic reactions?

Peanuts	Soy
Tree nuts (pecans, almonds, walnuts, etc.)	Fish
Milk	Wheat
Eggs	Shellfish

Children may outgrow their food allergies; however, allergies to peanuts, tree nut and seafood are often lifelong.

How much food does it take to cause an allergic reaction?

This varies. Some people are so allergic they develop an allergic reaction if they touch or smell the food.

What are the symptoms of a food allergic reaction?

Respiratory – itchy, watery eyes	shortness of breath
runny/stuffy nose	wheezing
sneezing/cough/throat clearing	tightness in chest
change in voice	difficulty swallowing
itching or swelling of lips, tongue, throat	

Skin – hives, swelling, itchy rash, eczema

Heart – low blood pressure, increased heart rate, shock

GI – cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, gas weakness

Neurological – feeling of impending doom,

There is no way to predict how a reaction will develop. Some are mild and go away after medication is given. Others become severe very quickly. Still others improve after medication is given but come back within hours. If an EpiPen® is given, 911 MUST be called.

What medications are used to treat food allergic reactions?

Antihistamines – for example, Benadryl

Asthma medications

Epinephrine – available in auto-injectors – EpiPen®

Food allergy reactions or anaphylaxis is life threatening. THEY NEED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AND TREATED PROMPTLY.

Management of Food Allergies

Avoidance of the food is the only way to prevent a reaction. The scientific and technical names of foods must be learned and every ingredient label read. There is the additional concern of cross-contamination during food processing or preparation. Everyone must be aware of the dangers of food allergies and help maintain an allergen managed environment for students in our school with food allergies.