

NORTH PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT FOOD ALLERGY POLICY	Approved: 12/20/23

Introduction

The North Providence School District is committed to the safety and health of all students and employees. This policy is intended to comply with the requirements of Rhode Island General Laws §§16-21-31 and 16-21-32. The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students with food allergies;
- Reduce the likelihood of severe or potentially life-threatening allergic reactions;
- Ensure a rapid and effective response in the case of a severe or potentially life threatening allergic reaction; and
- Protect the rights of food allergic students to participate in all school-sponsored activities.

Policy Statement

The prevalence of food allergies is increasing, affecting as many as 8% of children nationwide. Food allergies result in about 30,000 emergency room visits and claim about 150 lives every year. Nearly every school has students who have this severe, sometimes life-threatening condition, some of them undiagnosed. Schools are considered high risk areas for students with food allergies, with most incidents of accidental exposure occurring in schools. While schools may not be able to totally prevent allergic reactions, they can dramatically reduce both the likelihood of such reactions occurring and the severity of outcomes if they do occur. Effective prevention and treatment plans, proper procedures, well-trained staff and clear communication can save lives.

The level of sensitivity and the types and severity of reactions vary considerably among individuals with food allergies. Therefore, the school's approach to preventing and treating food allergies must be tailored to those individual's needs. At the same time, an undiagnosed student may experience an allergic reaction to food for the first time while at school and any allergic reaction can turn life-threatening. Therefore, the school's approach must also contain provisions for those scenarios.

Definitions

1.) Anaphylaxis is an acute allergic reaction that affects more than one system of the body. It is a life-threatening event. If someone exhibits difficulty breathing, a drop-in blood pressure, or symptoms in more than one body system (cutaneous, respiratory, gastrointestinal, or cardiovascular) after possible exposure to an allergen, it should be considered anaphylaxis.

2.) Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) means a set of procedural guidelines that provides specific directions about what to do in a particular emergency situation.

3.) Epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) is the treatment of choice to prevent or treat anaphylaxis. It can help reverse the symptoms and prevent progression to other symptoms.

4.) Epinephrine auto-injector (sometimes called EpiPen) is a device that is used for the automatic injection of epinephrine into the human body.

5.) Food allergy is an abnormal, adverse reaction to a food that is triggered by the body's immune system. The immune system responds to an otherwise harmless food as if it were harmful, resulting in the release of various chemicals, including histamines. The most common food allergies are to peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soy, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, and wheat.

6.) Food allergy symptoms are manifestations of the allergic reaction in various parts of the body. Symptoms may affect:

- The cutaneous system (skin inflammation, tingling, itching, hives, rash, swelling of the lips, tongue and/or throat);
- The respiratory system (runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing);
- The gastrointestinal tract (abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea); and
- The cardiovascular system (drop in blood pressure, dizziness, lightheadedness, heartbeat irregularities, fainting, shock).

Symptoms may begin immediately upon, or up to two hours after, exposure to an allergen. Some individuals exhibit initial symptoms followed by a second phase of symptoms two to four hours later. If more than one system is affected, it is considered anaphylaxis.

7.) Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) means a comprehensive plan for the care of children with special health care needs, including food allergies. IHCPs may include both preventive measures and treatment options.

Individual Health Care Plans and Emergency Health Care Plans

In all schools in North Providence, an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) and an Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) shall be developed for each student identified with any food allergy, as identified by a physician, with potentially serious health consequences. The school nurse teacher will develop the IHCP and EHCP in collaboration with the student's health care provider, the parents/guardians of the student, the student (if appropriate) and the building administrator or his/her designee. This shall be done prior to entry into school or immediately thereafter for students previously diagnosed with an allergy. It should be done immediately after the diagnosis for students already enrolled who are newly diagnosed with an allergy. These plans should include both preventative measures to help avoid accidental exposure to allergens and emergency measures in case of exposure. These plans will be developed collaboratively and shall be signed by the school nurse teacher, the student's parents/guardian, the student (if appropriate) and the building administrator.

Depending on the nature and extent of the student's allergy, the measures listed in the IHCP may include, but are not limited to:

- Posting additional signs (e.g., in classroom entryways);
- Prohibiting the sale of particular food items in the school;
- Designating special tables in the cafeteria;
- Prohibiting particular food items from certain classrooms and/or the cafeteria;
- Completely prohibiting particular food items from the school or school grounds;
- Educating school personnel, students, and families about food allergies; and/or
- Implementing particular protocols around cleaning surfaces touched by food products, washing of hands after eating, etc.

The measures implemented in these plans shall be in compliance with the North Providence Public School Department's Health and Wellness Policy.

A plan may also be developed for each staff member with a serious food allergy.

District Protocol

The Superintendent, in coordination with the school nurse teacher(s), shall implement a protocol, consistent with this policy and applicable state law, state rules and regulations and with guidance from the Rhode Island Department of Education, which provides food allergic students with protections while they are attending school or participating in school-sponsored activities.

Staff Training

Building administrator(s) and school nurse teacher(s) will provide ongoing training to staff, who may be involved in managing an emergency in a school, including anaphylaxis.

Bullying

All threats or harassment of students with regards to food allergies will be dealt with in accordance with the NPSD's Bullying Policy and pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws §16-21-26.

Confidentiality

Pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), the Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs (216-RICR-20-10-4), and other statutes and regulations, the confidentiality of students with food allergies shall be maintained, to the extent appropriate and as requested by the student's parents/guardians/caregivers.

Evaluation and Review

This policy shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, particularly after a serious allergic reaction has occurred at a school or at a school-sponsored activity, and shall be automatically amended to conform to amendments and changes in applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations.

Legal Reference

Rhode Island General Laws §§ 16-21-22, 16-21-26, 16-21-31, and 16-21-32

Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs (216-RICR-20-10-4)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 2 U.S.C. § 1331

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. § 1400, et.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. § 794

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), Pub. L. No. 104-191 (1996)

Rhode Island Regulations for First Aid and Emergencies, 216-RICR-20-10-4.21 (RI Code of Regulations (2023 Edition)).