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# FOOD ALLERGY TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS

TEACHER RESOURCE FOR  
EDUCATING STUDENTS

[allergyfacts.org.au/faw](http://allergyfacts.org.au/faw)  
[allergyaware.org.au](http://allergyaware.org.au)

Food Allergy Week is an initiative of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and is dedicated to promoting community understanding of food allergy.

# FOOD ALLERGY WEEK

ALLERGY & ANAPHYLAXIS AUSTRALIA

25 - 31 MAY 2026

This toolkit has been designed to help students understand the importance of supporting their classmates with food allergy. Teachers can help increase awareness of food allergy during Food Allergy Week or at any time of the year.

Food allergy has become increasingly common. In fact, it is estimated that 1 in 20 children have a food allergy and some will be at risk of a life-threatening allergic reaction. It is up to all of us to help people with food allergy stay safe.

## **This resource will help students to:**

- Understand the importance of supporting students with food allergy
- Encourage each other to be allergy aware
- Help students with food allergy to avoid the food they are allergic to
- Learn what to do if someone may be having an allergic reaction

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Permission is granted to copy and print this resource for educational purposes in schools.

## 1. FOOD ALLERGY BASICS

### a) What is food allergy?

Food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein the body (mistakenly) believes is harmful. When a person eats a food they are allergic to, the immune system releases large amounts of chemicals, triggering a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction.

Currently there is no cure for food allergy.

### b) What are the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction to food?

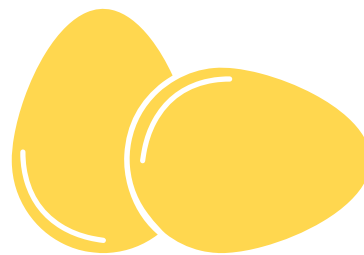
Allergic reactions to food can range from mild to severe. A severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. Signs and symptoms can start within a few minutes, or up to two hours, after having (even a small amount of) food or drink a person is allergic to.

#### Mild to moderate allergic reaction:

- Swelling of the face, lips and eyes
- Hives or welts
- Tingling mouth
- Abdominal pain, vomiting (*these are signs of a severe allergic reaction if a person is allergic to insects such as bees, wasps, ticks or ants*)

#### Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis):

- Difficult/noisy breathing
- Swelling of the tongue
- Swelling/tightness of the throat
- Difficulty talking and/or a hoarse voice
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (young children)



### c) What foods can cause food allergy?

Any food can trigger an allergic reaction and there are more than 170 foods reported to have caused one. However, there are 10 foods that cause 90 per cent of allergic reactions in Australia. These foods are called common food allergens. They are:

- Peanut
- Tree nuts (e.g. almonds, walnuts, cashews)
- Egg
- Milk (dairy) including cheese, butter, yoghurt, ice cream, cream
- Sesame
- Fish
- Crustacea (e.g. prawn, crab, lobster)
- Molluscs (e.g. oysters, clams, mussels)
- Soy
- Wheat (e.g. flour which is often found in bread, biscuits and cakes)

There are laws about how common allergens are labelled on packaged foods.

## 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ALLERGY AWARE?

Allergy Aware means having many things in place to reduce the risk of an allergic reaction and to recognise and treat an allergic reaction well if it happens. Rather than banning foods students are allergic to, reducing risk includes:

- Staff training
- Having anaphylaxis policies and documentation
- Good communication about allergies
- Having emergency response plans and practising them
- Age-appropriate education about allergies and helping friends
- Measures such as handwashing and not sharing food

Further information can be found at: [Strategies to reduce risk - Allergy Aware](#)

### **Why food bans are not recommended**

Banning foods is not an effective strategy for preventing or managing anaphylaxis in schools and can give staff, students and families a false sense of security. Banning one food, such as peanut, does not help protect a student with other food allergies. Students can be allergic to a wide range of foods such as cow's milk, egg and wheat which are staple foods that cannot be removed from school.

Having some food restrictions is not the same as 'banning' a food. For young students it is reasonable to ask parents not to send messy egg sandwiches or sticky nut spreads in the lunch box for example. However, asking the entire school to avoid specific foods is unreasonable.

Everyone in the school community should be Allergy Aware to help keep students with allergy safe.

**Students** with food allergy can do things to keep themselves safe, such as washing their hands before they eat and telling a teacher if they feel unwell. However, it will depend on the age of the student as to how much responsibility they should be expected to take.

**Schools** have a duty of care and should have many strategies in place to help keep students with food allergy safe.

- Schools should follow the [Best practice guidelines for anaphylaxis prevention and management in Schools - Allergy Aware](#)
- Find out more about being an [Allergy Aware school](#)
- Examples of Allergy Aware strategies can be found on page 8.

**All students** can also do things to help keep their friends with food allergy safe. See page 5.

### 3. HOW CAN WE HELP KEEP EACH OTHER SAFE?

All students can do things to help keep their friends (mates) with food allergy safe. Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia has designed the Be A MATE Program to help.

**Anyone can 'Be A MATE', and help to Make Allergy Treatment Easier, by following these five easy steps:**

#### **Always take food allergies seriously**

It may be hard to believe food that most of us eat and enjoy every day can be harmful to others, but people who have food allergy can have serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) which can be life-threatening.

#### **Don't share food with mates who have food allergy**

Everyone loves to share or swap food with others, but for those with food allergy, this can be very dangerous. Never share your food with mates with food allergy. Even if you think the food is safe, it's still not worth taking the risk.

#### **Wash hands after eating**

Wash your hands after eating something another student is allergic to. This will help keep them safe.

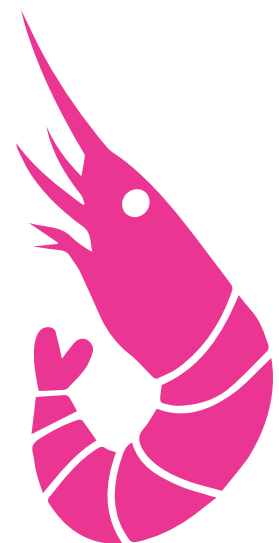
#### **Know what your mates are allergic to**

Ask your mates what food(s) they are allergic to. Think of your classmates with food allergy when eating your food and try not to be messy. For school birthday parties and celebrations, consider non-food treats and activities like stamps and stickers.

#### **Get help straight away if a mate gets sick (even if they don't want you to)**

If a mate who has food or insect allergy is showing the below signs, tell them to lie on the ground where they are, and get a teacher or person in charge straight away:

- Finding it hard to breathe. (If their breathing is worse when they are lying down, they can sit on the ground with their legs out in front of them (not hanging down like when sitting on a chair))
- Skin that is bumpy, red and itchy
- Swelling of the face, lips and eyes



## 4. CLASS DISCUSSIONS

The following questions and answers are some ideas to get discussion going in your classroom to help reduce the risk of an allergic reaction and help students be more understanding and considerate of each other.

**a) Is it OK for someone with a food allergy to eat just a tiny amount?**

**E.g. can someone with a milk allergy have just a small sip of a milkshake?**

No. Even a tiny amount of a food can cause a very serious allergic reaction.

If people eat food they are allergic to, they usually show signs of an allergic reaction within two hours, but often you can see they are having an allergic reaction within minutes.

People often start out with a mild or moderate reaction that can sometimes progress to a severe allergic reaction. Sometimes a reaction is severe straight away with no obvious mild or moderate symptoms first, such as hives or vomiting. Find out more about [signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction](#).

**b) Your classmate has an egg allergy. Someone in the class brings in their birthday cupcakes to share. Your friend can't have any because they contain egg. What can you do to make your friend feel better?**

Suggest to the person whose birthday it is ahead of time that your friend has a food allergy and maybe they could bring a non-food treat for everyone or a non-food treat just for your friend with food allergy. This way everyone can share in the birthday celebration.

Don't share food with your friend with food allergy. They may need to be reminded not to take food from their classmates.

Suggest to your friend having a treat jar in the classroom with the teacher that has food that does not contain their allergen. Then when a birthday celebration takes place, your friend with food allergy can still enjoy their own treat from home.

**c) People living with food allergy have to think about what is in the food or drink they have at every snack or meal time. If they forget to ask what is in a food, and it contains the food they are allergic to, they will have an allergic reaction. How can you help them stay safe? How can the community support people with food allergy?**

- Talk to the person with food allergy or their parents about helping to keep them safe
- Remind them about their food allergy if they forget and accidentally accept food from someone
- Wash hands after eating, especially if you eat something they are allergic to
- Stick up for your friend if someone is teasing them about their allergy
- Tell a teacher if they feel sick, even if they don't want you too. You won't get into trouble.

## 5. ACTIVITY – WHAT'S IN A FOOD?

### AIM:

Learn about common allergens in foods and how to identify them. For example, ice-cream can contain peanut, tree nuts or egg, and bread can contain milk and/or egg.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Magazines or supermarket catalogues with pictures of both packaged and unpackaged food (e.g. served on a plate)
- Food packets for label reading
- Student lunchboxes

### ACTIVITIES:

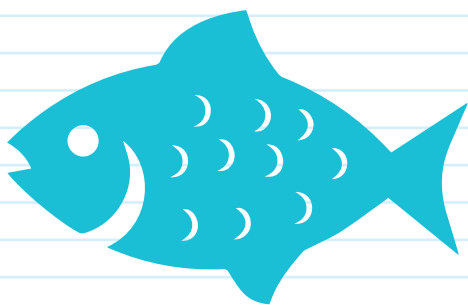
- Using pictures, or student lunchboxes, identify what allergens are clearly in those foods and others that might be there but are less obvious. Explain that often you cannot see the allergen in the food, such as milk in bread. This is why people with food allergy need to tell people about their food allergy when eating out.
- Read labels of packaged food containers to find out what allergens are in that food.
- Discuss ingredients of homemade foods e.g. sandwiches.
- Discuss how to keep each other safe (see page 5).

Additional classroom activities are available to download from [Be a Mate - Primary School](#).



## 6. ALLERGY AWARE CHECKLIST

- The school follows the [Best practice guidelines for anaphylaxis prevention and management in schools - Allergy Aware](#)
- The school has an [anaphylaxis management policy](#)
- The school has an anaphylaxis emergency response plan that is practiced
- The school informs their community how they manage the risk of anaphylaxis and how the community can support the school's approach
- Staff know which students are at risk of anaphylaxis
- Staff do [free anaphylaxis e-training](#)
- Staff know the [signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction](#) and remember to follow the student's ASCIA Action Plan
- Staff who prepare and serve food do free online [All About Allergens](#) food allergen training
- Staff and parents of students with food allergy complete an [Individualised Anaphylaxis Care Plan](#) together
- Staff communicate in advance with parents of students with food allergy about activities that involve food including excursions and camps
- Staff teach all students about risk reduction measures such as hand washing and not sharing food



## 7. USEFUL LINKS



### **Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia**

[allergyfacts.org.au](http://allergyfacts.org.au)

[allergyfacts.org.au/school](http://allergyfacts.org.au/school)

### **Food Allergy Week**

[allergyfacts.org.au/faw](http://allergyfacts.org.au/faw)

### **Allergy Aware**

Information and practical resources to help prevent and manage anaphylaxis in school and children's education and care settings

[allergyaware.org.au](http://allergyaware.org.au)

### **Reading food labels**

[foodallergyaware.org.au/everyone/reading-food-labels-for-food-allergens](http://foodallergyaware.org.au/everyone/reading-food-labels-for-food-allergens)

### **ASCIA (Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy)**

[allergy.org.au](http://allergy.org.au)

FREE e-training course for the community and school staff

[allergy.org.au/patients/anaphylaxis-e-training-first-aid-community](http://allergy.org.au/patients/anaphylaxis-e-training-first-aid-community)





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