

November 2015

My name is Christina Allore, I am a Registered Nurse at both of our local hospitals, as well as the mother of a child with multiple food allergies. My daughter attends the same school as your child/children, and one of her more serious allergies is to PEANUTS.

I am providing this information in the hopes that it will help to further educate children and their families on how important it is to follow the peanut aware rules in our school.

I am aware that there are many people who do not fully understand allergies, or who do not believe that allergies are "real". Allergies are actually a very misunderstood concept, even in the medical community.

There has been a rise in the number of food allergies over the years, I think many of us would be hard pressed to remember even one child who had an allergy when we attended school. The belief is that because over time, our civilized world has become more aware of diseases and germs, and we have tried to protect ourselves, we have in fact decreased the body's ability to provide immunity to certain things and essentially confused it. In some people, this means that their body is not able to tell the difference between something safe and something threatening. Some foods are then treated by the body as threatening and the body basically goes into attack mode on itself.

There is also a hereditary factor, meaning that some of us have passed on our allergic tendencies to our children.

Even the slightest contamination of the school environment can cause a threat to an allergic child. If your child brings a peanut product to school and then eats this product at school or on the bus, they have potentially transferred peanut proteins (the part of the peanut that causes the allergic reaction) onto many surfaces:

- 1) their hands inevitably have peanut protein residue
- 2) their desk may have peanut protein residue
- 3) any doorknob, tap, wall surface, handrail, backpack, sports equipment etc that they touch prior to properly washing their hands may also have peanut protein residue

Any of these surfaces will hold the peanut protein residue, and possibly transfer to an allergic child's hands. This allergic child may then touch their own food, or bring their hands to their mouth and contaminate themselves unknowingly. They may also have a sibling that unknowingly touches a contaminated surface and then carries that residue home on their belongings. It only takes a small amount to trigger a life threatening reaction.

Allergic children should be taught to always be aware of their environment, to wash their hands regularly and to not share food. They are expected to be quite responsible for themselves, more so than the average child who doesn't really need to question their surroundings. Please try to imagine the allergic child; carefully watching what her/his peers are consuming, being vigilant about hand washing, constantly worrying about whether others are abiding by a rule that is in place to protect her/his life.

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As a parent of an allergic child I have educated my daughter to be responsible and aware in order for her to be as safe as possible. We face the reality of potential allergen exposures whenever she leaves our home, and accept that it's a part of our life. We know that when going into a grocery store, a mall, or especially a family centered event like a zoo or theme park, we must be on high alert to potential allergens. We do not expect that these places we visit occasionally be strictly peanut free, we accept that there's a level of risk.

What I do expect is that my child/children will be safe when attending school. I am sure that you, as a parent of a non-allergic child, expect the same. A safe, non-threatening environment for your child/children, as it is an extension of their home environment. During the school year, our kids are in school, during waking hours, more than they are awake and active at home! Every single child deserves to BE and FEEL safe when at home and school.

I understand that your child/children may not eat anything other than peanut butter sandwiches, and you may feel angry that you're unable to find a different source of nourishment for them. If this is similar to your situation, I ask that you try to understand what it means to another child or family if you break the Peanut Aware rules by allowing your child/children their favourite food at school. There are other times, such as at breakfast or as an after school snack, when they can eat and enjoy peanut products, please do not let it be during the school hours when their favourite food could potentially kill another child. There are resources available that will help in suggesting alternative foods for your child/children.

I am providing the attached information, frequently asked allergy questions, in the hopes that you and your child/children will take a few minutes to read it over and discuss it. Please take the time to ask your child/children if they know of any children at their school who have allergies. Please ask them if they understand what happens if these children are exposed to an allergen like peanuts. Please ask them what they believe their role is in helping to prevent an allergic reaction.

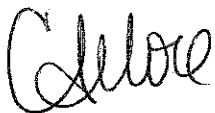
It is my hope that this information package will trigger a conversation in your home, and help to answer any questions that you may have had, or address any issues that you may not have known existed in the life of an allergic child. I appreciate you taking the time to read this, and I thank you for trying to understand this very serious issue.

You can also find this and further information at foodallergycanada.ca

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments:

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Christina Allore