

## **Food Allergies and Anaphylaxis**

It is the goal of Lakes Magnet Middle School to provide a safe learning environment for all of our students. In an effort to reduce the risk of food allergy reactions, we aim to take steps toward that goal through education and awareness. Lake's is prepared for food allergy emergencies, but we are asking *ALL* Lakes' families, whether or not they have allergies, to learn about and understand the importance and potential severity of food allergy reactions and anaphylaxis. Education and awareness will help ensure we can create a safe environment for everyone.

### **Increasing Awareness**

"A food allergy is defined as an adverse health effect arising from a specific immune response that occurs reproducibly on exposure to a given food" (CDC, 2013, p. 17). Some of the most common food allergens are milk, eggs, fish and shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts and tree nuts (CDC, 2013). Some food allergies can initiate an immune response called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is life-threatening and requires immediate medical attention. Symptoms of anaphylaxis can present as throat swelling, difficulty breathing, or even as mild symptoms, such as a rash or watery eyes. There is no way to predict whether initial mild symptoms will progress to an anaphylactic reaction resulting in death. Being aware of food allergy symptoms and knowing what actions to take could be a matter of life or death for someone.

### **Identifying Signs and Symptoms of Anaphylaxis**

Signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction to food can vary widely, both in type and severity. Some symptoms may happen immediately, and some may take up to several hours to present. People may experience symptoms only after ingestion of a food allergen, yet others may have a reaction after inhalation or even mere skin contact with the allergen. Many allergic reactions are mild and will resolve spontaneously, but anaphylaxis may initially present as mild symptoms as well. Knowing the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction helps to know when there is potential for an emergency and when help should be summoned.

#### **Here are some signs and symptoms of allergic reaction:**

- Coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness
- Swollen lips or tongue, trouble speaking or swallowing
- Red, watery eyes
- Itchiness, rash or hives
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, acid reflux
- Dizziness, pale or bluish skin, weak pulse, fainting
- Sense of "impending doom", mood changes, confusion

### **Understanding the Importance of Finding a Staff Member to Get Help**

Adolescents and young adults are at an increased risk of death from anaphylaxis, especially if they have a known food allergy, have had anaphylaxis before, or have asthma (CDC, 2013). Delaying administration of epinephrine to a person who is having anaphylaxis could result in death. It is very important to summon help whenever anyone is displaying signs and symptoms of allergic reaction, so that the school nurse or other trained staff members can intervene as appropriate, either by administering epinephrine or calling 911.

### **Understanding Why It Is NOT Okay to Bully**

People with food allergies who are bullied, teased or harassed may have an even more severe reaction when exposed to his/her allergen because of the psychological distress it causes (CDC, 2013). Students with food allergies may feel that they are not accepted or are a burden to others. Peer pressure and social isolation can lead to risk-taking behaviors of themselves and/or of their peers, that could expose them to their food allergens. Students should feel empowered in sharing the responsibility to prevent social isolation and bullying of all students, including those with allergies. They should be expected to be good citizens, treat others with respect, and to not be passive bystanders if they recognize bullying of their peers. Creating a positive psychosocial climate for students with allergies through education and awareness can help to decrease the feelings of anxiety and social isolation. Together with staff members and parents, students can help create a supportive culture to reduce peer pressure and improve social interactions.

### **Hand-washing and Allergen Safe Zones**

It is important to understand the potential of contamination of nut proteins from other food products and surfaces. Oils from nuts can seep through wax paper, or be spread from utensils and food slicers. Exposures can occur from the nut proteins being spread from the hands of someone who has eaten nuts and then touched a surface, like a desk top. Cleaning surfaces with water alone will not remove food allergens; soap or an all-purpose cleaner must be used. Hand sanitizers will not effectively remove food allergens: proper hand-washing with soap and water must be performed to prevent the transfer of the allergen. There is a "Nut-Free" table in the cafeteria at Lakes. This table is designated as an allergen safe zone. This table is designated for students who have nut allergies, where they can be assured they are eating in a safe environment. This table is monitored by staff, ensuring that only school-bought lunches or nut-free home lunches are eaten at this table.

It is the goal of Lakes magnet Middle School to provide a safe place for students to thrive, learn and succeed! Please be part of our collaborative efforts to become educated about food allergies and to raise awareness!

Thank you

Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.