

## **Child Safety: Food Allergies (Video 6)**

Nate Chomilo: Hello. I'm Dr. Nate Chomilo. I'll be your host for this episode of Keeping Them Safe.

Today's topic is food allergies. Early childhood programs play an important role in keeping children safe, and that includes from food allergies. Requirements for your programs vary greatly from state to state. Most states, territories, tribes, or local health departments may have different regulations, training requirements, or other procedures in place. It is important to understand and follow your state or local regulations. Food allergies occur in 2 to 8% of infants and children. Allergic reactions to food range from mild skin or gastrointestinal symptoms to severe, life-threatening reactions with respiratory or cardiovascular compromise. Hospitalizations from food allergies are being reported in increasing numbers, especially among children with asthma who have one or more food sensitivities.

Keeping up-to-date care plans and having the ability to implement these plans for treatment of food reactions is essential. In early education settings, the most important step in keeping children with food allergies safe is to make sure you have in place a care plan prepared by the child's primary health care provider. This plan should include a written list of foods to which the child is allergic, along with instructions on actions to take to avoid these foods; a detailed treatment plan or individualized health plan that will be implemented in the event of an allergic reaction that includes names, doses, and methods of administration of any needed medications; a list of specific symptoms that would indicate the need to administer medications. Another important step is to ensure that caregivers or teachers have received training and are able to demonstrate competence in implementing measures for preventing exposure to specific foods that cause the allergic reactions, recognizing the symptoms of an allergic reaction, and treating an allergic reaction.

Additional steps that will help ensure food allergies are addressed appropriately are to arrange for your program to have on hand properly stored necessary medications, have appropriate equipment and training for staff to manage a child's food allergy while the child is in your care, ensure your caregivers or teachers can promptly and properly administer prescribed medications in the event of an allergic reaction using instructions from the child's care plan. All this information can be found in Caring for Our Children, a collection of best practice standards for early care and education programs. If a child is suspected to have ingested a problem food or is having allergic reaction, there should be a plan to follow the child's treatment or individualized health plan; notify parents, guardians immediately; remind or recommend to the family that the child's primary care provider be notified if the child require treatment. If a child has any serious allergic reactions or whenever an EpiPen has been administered, your program should contact emergency medical services immediately, even if the child appears to have recovered from the allergic reaction.

To ensure children with food allergies are cared for appropriately, parents or guardians of all children in the program should be advised to avoid any known allergens in class treats or special foods they might bring in. Individual child food allergies should be posted prominently in the classroom or wherever food is served so that staff can view them regularly.

The child's written treatment or individualized health plan, a mobile phone, and a list of proper medications should be carried on field trips or any transport out of the early care and education setting, in the event the child develops an acute allergic reaction. Your timely response and preparation to prevent allergic reactions can keep children safe from potentially harmful exposure. To see a more complete list of procedures to reduce exposure, please visit the link for Caring for Our Children on the video landing page.

Before we close, I have two reflective questions for you. What are your program plans for reducing risk in responding to allergic reactions to food? How do you ensure that all staff with contact or responsibility for children with food allergies are aware of their treatment or individualized health plans?

Thank you for spending this time with me. We will see you on another episode of Keeping Them Safe. Remember: The more you learn, the safer they are.