

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Guidance for Accommodating Students with
Potentially Life-threatening Peanut and Tree Nut Allergies**

During the last 20 years, food allergies have become more prevalent in our community and nationwide. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) strives to work together with students and their parents to address food allergies and appropriately accommodate the needs of all students. As the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have recognized; however, it is impossible to “guarantee a totally safe environment because there is no reasonable or fail-safe way to prevent an allergen from inadvertently entering into a building.”¹

Background

This guidance was developed in response to a review by MCPS staff members and other stakeholders of particular issues raised by peanut and tree nut allergies.² Peanut or tree nut allergies may cause anaphylaxis—a severe systematic reaction resulting in circulatory collapse or shock that may be fatal. This guidance addresses the management in schools of these potentially life-threatening allergies, which are referred to as “severe” peanut or tree nut allergies throughout the guidance. While students with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy are present in both elementary and secondary schools, this guidance has been tailored particularly for the elementary school environment. For secondary schools, accommodations can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis to facilitate the management of a student’s severe peanut or tree nut allergy in those environments.

Management of a student’s severe peanut or tree nut allergy is a team effort among principals and staff members, school health services staff members, and families. When a parent/guardian notifies a school of a student’s severe peanut or tree nut allergy, the school nurse should develop an individual health care plan (IHCP) to accommodate the student’s specific needs in accordance with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services School Health Services requirements. The principal or designee should support the school nurse in the development of the student’s IHCP and facilitate consultation with the student’s parents/guardians to create a plan that meets the student’s needs. In addition, a student’s severe peanut or tree nut allergy may be considered a disability under *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act* and other civil rights laws. In these cases, the principal or designee should engage other staff members as needed to develop and implement Section 504 plans consistent with legal requirements, Board of Education policies and MCPS regulations.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*, 9, available at: www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf.

² Some examples of tree nuts are walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios, and Brazil nuts. For an extensive list, see www.foodallergy.org/allergens/tree-nut-allergy.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of recommended accommodations that schools should consider as reasonable accommodations for students *with an IHCP or a Section 504 plan* for a severe peanut or tree nut allergy. If parents/guardians do not want one of these accommodations for the student, the school should work with the parents/guardians to consider whether there are alternative accommodations that may be feasible. These accommodations do not replace MCPS procedures to provide emergency care for students experiencing anaphylaxis. If a student experiences an anaphylactic reaction, MCPS staff members should continue to follow established emergency procedures, set forth in MCPS Regulation JPD-RB, *Emergency Care for Students Experiencing Anaphylaxis*.

Schoolwide

- All school staff members shall keep a student's medical information regarding the peanut or tree nut allergy confidential, as appropriate.
- The principal or designee should establish no-eating policies in areas where food would not be appropriate, such as computer labs and media centers. Teachers should limit food in classrooms, except for snacks and classroom parties as indicated below.
- The principal or designee should establish and implement a plan to inform the student's teachers, and other staff, as appropriate, of the accommodations put in place to address the student's severe peanut or tree nut allergy. In the event of a teacher's absence, the principal or designee should develop and implement a plan for informing substitute teachers about the accommodations.
- The principal or designee should post a sign on the student's classroom doors stating that there is a student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy who uses the room. A sample sign is provided (Attachment A).
- Students should be encouraged to wear jewelry related to their medical condition.
- All school staff should be aware of and sensitive to how students with severe peanut or tree nut allergies are treated by other students. It is important to protect students from discrimination or harassment based on an allergy or accommodations for the allergy.

Lunchroom

Principal responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member:

- Provide a table in the lunch room during lunch periods that is "nut-free" for students with an anaphylactic allergy to peanuts or tree nuts as required by Maryland law.
- Allow friends of the student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy who sits at the "nut-free" table to join the student for lunch if they have purchased a nut-safe school lunch that day, and subject to available seating.
- In collaboration with building services staff, establish cleaning protocols for the "nut-free" table to avoid cross-contamination, including using separate cleaning supplies for the table.

Classroom

Teacher responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member by the principal:

- Assign a student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy to the same desk throughout the school year for his/her exclusive use.
- Do not give the student helper jobs in the classroom that could expose the student to peanuts or tree nuts.
- Keep the student's lunch separate from the lunches of other students.
- Consider using alternatives to food items as rewards for all students. Nonfood rewards may include stickers, school supplies, other trinkets, and privileges such as allowing a student to be line leader or to pick a book for the teacher to read to the class.
- In collaboration with the principal or designee and building services staff members, establish cleaning protocols for the student's desk to avoid cross contamination, including using separate cleaning supplies for the desk.

Snacks

Principal responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member:

- If the school has regular snack times, the principal should send a letter home at the beginning of the year to all parents/guardians of students in the classroom: (a) stating that there is a child with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy in the class; (b) urging that any snacks that they send to school with their children for consumption within a classroom do not contain peanut or tree nuts; and (c) urging them to tell their own children not to share their snacks with other students. A sample letter is provided (Attachment B).
- Other parents/guardians should be informed of accommodations for students in their child's classrooms without any reference to a particular child.

Teacher responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member by the principal:

- Ensure that students with severe peanut or tree nut allergies are included in class snack time.
- Discourage students from trading or sharing snacks.
- If a teacher keeps backup snacks for students, ensure that all backup snacks do not contain peanuts or tree nuts or ask parents/guardians of the student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy to provide nonperishable backup snacks and a separate "safe box" to store them.
- Reinforce hand washing with soap and water or use of hand sanitizing wipes before and after eating in the classroom.
- If school staff members become aware that another student in the classroom has a snack containing peanuts or tree nuts, school staff members should monitor the situation to reduce the possibility that the student with the allergy comes into contact with the snack.

Classroom Parties

Teacher responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member by the principal:

- Provide advance notice to the parents/guardians of the student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy when food will be provided for a classroom party.
- Require that any food provided for classroom parties be store-bought, labeled, and contained in a sealed package. Food products with labels indicating that the product contains any peanut or tree nut ingredients or stating that the food product was manufactured in a facility that also processes peanuts or tree nuts are not permitted for classroom parties.
- Provide parents/guardians of the student with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy the opportunity to provide a nut-safe alternative treat for the student.

Field Trips

Teacher responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member by the principal:

- Ensure that students with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy are included in field trips.
- Provide advance notification of field trips to the parents/guardians of the student as well as to the school nurse.
- Permit parents/guardians of the student to attend all field trips if they express interest in doing so in advance of the field trip.
- Keep the student's lunch or snacks separate from those of other students.
- When ordering field trip lunches from the MCPS Division of Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS), request only meals that do not contain peanuts or tree nuts.
- Plan eating situations to limit exposure of the student to peanuts or tree nuts, such as following recommendations for snacks if eating in an enclosed space.
- If the student's parents/guardians have provided an epinephrine auto-injector for the student to be kept at school, bring the student's epinephrine auto-injector and instructions along on field trips, and ensure that a designated staff member is trained by the school nurse on the student's IHCP, appropriate use of an epinephrine auto-injector, and MCPS emergency procedures. Assign the student to the designated staff member's group for field trip activities.
- If the student's parents/guardians have not provided an epinephrine auto-injector to be kept at school, consult with the parents/guardians and school nurse about the field trip.

MCPS Sponsored After-school Activities

Principal responsibilities, unless delegated to another staff member:

- Ensure that students with a severe peanut or tree nut allergy are not excluded from MCPS sponsored after-school activities because of the allergy.
- In any school where a student with a severe tree nut or peanut allergy participates in a MCPS sponsored after-school activity, ensure at least one individual on site is trained by the school nurse on recognizing the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis, on the appropriate use an epinephrine auto-injector, and on MCPS emergency procedures to call 911.

- In collaboration with building services staff members, establish cleaning protocols to wipe down the desk of the student who has a severe peanut or tree nut allergy if the student's classroom is used for an after-school activity *before the start of the following day* with separate cleaning supplies to reduce the possibility of contamination by peanut or tree nuts.

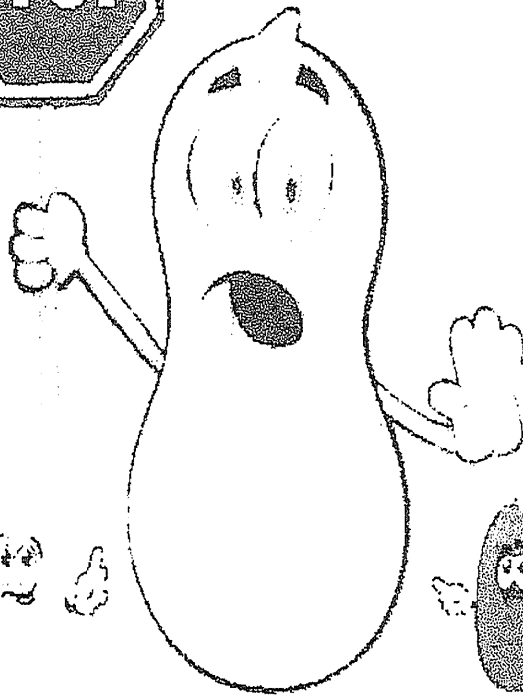
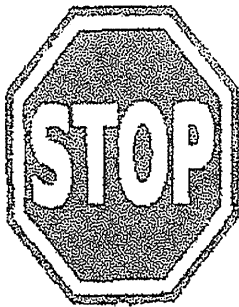
School Buses

- MCPS Department of Transportation (DOT) provides bus operators and bus attendants with general awareness training on recognizing the symptoms of anaphylaxis. In the event of an anaphylactic reaction, bus operators and bus attendants should respond in accordance with transportation protocols to call the dispatcher, who will call 911.
- If implementation of the student's IHCP or Section 504 plan requires the assistance of bus operators or bus attendants, the principal or designee should work with DOT to coordinate accommodations for the student and train bus operators or bus attendants on the relevant portions of the student's IHCP or Section 504 plan.

Food Services

- Food service staff members should follow sound food handling practices to avoid cross contamination with potential peanut or tree nut allergens.
- If implementation of the student's IHCP or Section 504 plan requires the assistance of food service staff members, the principal or designee should work with the cafeteria manager and/or DFNS to coordinate accommodations for the student.
- Current menus and allergen information are available at:

NO PEANUTS/TREE NUTS PLEASE!



**PEANUT/TREE NUT
SAFE CLASSROOM.**

For the safety of our children who have severe peanut or tree nut allergies, please do not bring peanut or tree nut products into this classroom.



Sample Notice to Parents

(Date)

Date:

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

Food allergies have become common among students nationally and within our school system. Currently, one or more students in your child's class have a severe food allergy to peanuts and/or tree nuts that could result in a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. In order to minimize the risks to these students and to strengthen healthy habits, we encourage students to wash their hands before and after eating, and we are reminding them not to share food with their classmates. We ask for your support in reinforcing these habits at home.

In addition, we urge you to send snacks that **do not** contain any peanuts or tree nuts such as walnuts, cashews, pecans, pine nuts, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios, and Brazil nuts. Some online resources and nut-safe food lists include: www.foodallergy.org/home, www.peanutfreelife.com/safe-food-list/ and snacksafely.com/snacklist.pdf.

If you would like to provide food for a classroom celebration, please provide only food items that are store-bought, labeled, and contained in a sealed package. Food products with labels indicating that the product contains any peanut or tree nut ingredients or stating that the food product was manufactured in a facility that also processes peanuts or tree nuts are not permitted for classroom parties. Please consult with the classroom teacher in advance of the celebration.

We strive to enable all students to fully participate in activities while maintaining a safe learning environment.

Thank you for your understanding and assistance in making this a safe and healthy school year for all our students.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (phone number).

Sincerely,

Principal