



# **Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies In Schools and Early Care and Education Programs**

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

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Food allergies are a growing food safety and public health concern that affect an estimated 4%–6% of children in the United States.<sup>1,2</sup> Children with food allergies are two to four times more likely to have asthma or other allergic conditions than those without food allergies.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of food allergies among children increased 18% during 1997–2007, and allergic reactions to foods have become the most common cause of anaphylaxis in community health settings. In 2006, about 88% of schools had one or more students with a food allergy. Staff who work in schools and early care and education (ECE) programs should develop plans for how they will respond effectively to children with food allergies. Although the number of children with food allergies in any one school or ECE program may seem small, allergic reactions can be life-threatening and have far-reaching effects on children and their families, as well as on the schools or ECE programs they attend. Any child with a food allergy deserves attention and the school or ECE program should create a plan for preventing an allergic reaction and responding to a food allergy emergency. Studies show that 16%–18% of children with food allergies have had a reaction from accidentally eating food allergens while at school. In addition, 25% of the severe and potentially life-threatening reactions (anaphylaxis) reported at schools happened in children with no previous diagnosis of food allergy. School and ECE program staff should be ready to address the needs of children with known food allergies. They also should be prepared to respond effectively to the emergency needs of children who are not known to have food allergies but who exhibit allergic signs and symptoms. Until now, no national guidelines had been developed to help schools and ECE programs address the needs of the growing numbers of children with food allergies. However, 14 states and many school districts have formal policies or guidelines to improve the management of food allergies in schools. Many schools and ECE programs have implemented some of the steps needed to manage food allergies effectively.<sup>4</sup> Yet systematic planning for managing the risk of food allergies and responding to food allergy emergencies in schools and ECE programs remain incomplete and inconsistent.

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