

ANAPHYLAXIS

Food allergy occurs in around 1 in 20 children and in about 1 in 100 adults. The majority of food allergies in children are not severe, and will disappear with time. The most common triggers are hen's egg, cow's milk, peanuts and tree nuts. Less common triggers include seafood, sesame, soy, fish and wheat. Peanuts, tree nuts, seeds and seafood are the major triggers for life long allergies. Some food allergies can be severe, causing life threatening reactions known as anaphylaxis.

Symptoms of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) involve the breathing and circulatory systems and may include any of the following: difficult / noisy breathing, swelling of tongue, swelling / tightness in throat, difficulty talking / hoarse voice, wheeze or persistent cough, dizziness (loss of consciousness and/or collapse), and becoming pale and floppy in young children.

We currently do not have clear information as to why food allergy seems to have increased so rapidly in recent years, particularly in young children. Proposed explanations (which have not yet been proven in studies) include:

- hygiene hypothesis, which proposes that less exposure to infections in early childhood is associated with an increased risk of allergy
- delayed versus early introduction of allergenic foods such as egg, peanut or tree nuts
- methods of food processing, such as roasted versus boiled peanuts
- development of allergy to food by skin exposure, such as the use of nut oil based moisturisers

This area requires additional research studies, several of which are underway.

Mandatory training on anaphylaxis management is scheduled regularly at Star of the Sea School. Death from anaphylaxis is preventable if people are correctly diagnosed, educated and cared for by those who can help minimise the risk of reactions and then know how to administer an EpiPen® (auto injector containing adrenaline) in an emergency before rapid transport to hospital via ambulance".

Each student who has a food allergy is required to provide a medical management plan, EpiPens and other prescribed medication. At Star of the Sea School, children with severe allergies wear a red broad brimmed hat to outside play rather than the uniform blue one. Students are educated on the seriousness of these allergic reactions. Whilst we do not ban any of these foods coming into the school, parents are requested to leave such items out of the lunch boxes.

A ritual of hand washing is undertaken by all students at eating times. All children are discouraged from sharing food with others. It is particularly important for children with anaphylaxis to be trained not to take food that their parents have not packed for them. These children will also have birthday cakes supplied by their parents so that they feel included when children are celebrating birthdays at school with their classmates.