

# ALLERGY 250K SCHOOL AGED TEEN CAMPS INCREASE CONFIDENCE TO MANAGE ALLERGIES

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## Abstract

**Background:** The National Allergy Council Allergy 250K project, funded by the Federal Department of Health, aims to provide age-appropriate information and resources to young people living with severe allergies, and to help them to feel more connected with peers with similar experiences in a fun, informative way. Annual Allergy 250K school aged teen camps have been conducted which aim to increase participant confidence in managing their allergies, particularly food allergies.

**Method:** This study reviewed the outcomes from all Allergy 250K school aged teen camps held across Australia between January 2019 and March 2024. The target group for the camps were 10-17 year olds who were still at school and have a severe allergy, particularly food allergy. At the end of the camp, participants completed a camp evaluation form.

**Results:** Six camps were conducted. Camps were held in New South Wales (2019 and 2024), Victoria (2019), South Australia (2022), Western Australia (2022) and Queensland (2023). In total, 125 children aged 9-17 years participated in an Allergy 250K school aged teen camp.

The camp evaluation was completed by 123 of 125 camp participants (98% response rate). For each camp, participants indicated that they felt more confident to manage their food allergies after participating in the camp. They reported that their confidence increased across several areas: a) attending other camps; b) choosing foods prepared by someone other than their parents, c) telling other people about their allergy; d) telling adults other than their parents about their allergy; e) talking to their friends about their allergy; f) managing their anxiety about their allergy and g) being more responsible for managing their allergy.

**Conclusion:** Allergy 250K school aged teen camps have been successful in increasing the confidence of camp participants in managing their allergies, particularly food allergies.

## Allergy 250K teen camp locations



"I felt at home here, the food that was specially made was great! During this camp I finally felt that I belonged with everyone."

## Aim

The Allergy 250K camps aim to bring school aged teens together connecting them with others living with severe allergies. This helps them feel less alone in managing their allergy, particularly their allergies. The camps also aim to increase their confidence in speaking out about and managing their allergy.

Table 1

	Sydney January 2019	Melbourne November 2019	Adelaide September 2022	Perth December 2022	Sunshine Coast March 2023	Sydney March 2024
<b>After attending an Allergy 250K camp, campers reported their confidence was increased 'very much':</b>	% n/n	% n/n	% n/n	% n/n	% n/n	% n/n
• About being away from home for extended periods of time	19% 4/21	65% 13/20	39% 7/18	23% 3/13	41% 7/17	38% 13/34
• When attending other camps	33% 7/21	65% 13/20	28% 5/18	15% 2/13	47% 8/17	47% 16/34
• When choosing foods being prepared by someone other than my parents	62% 13/21	80% 16/20	61% 11/18	38% 5/13	76% 13/17	76% 26/34
• Telling other people my age about my allergy	48% 10/21	80% 16/20	61% 11/18	38% 5/13	64% 11/17	62% 21/34
• Telling adults, other than my parents about my allergy	67% 14/21	80% 16/20	61% 11/18	62% 8/13	59% 10/17	59% 19/34
• Talking to my friends about my allergy, and explaining to them how to use my adrenaline injector	48% 10/21	70% 14/20	44% 8/18	46% 6/13	41% 7/17	50% 17/34
• In managing my anxiety about my food allergy	33% 7/21	75% 15/20	39% 7/18	23% 3/13	47% 8/17	35% 12/34
• To be more responsible for managing my allergy, rather than leaving this all to my parents	62% 13/21	80% 16/20	67% 12/18	62% 8/13	71% 12/17	62% 21/34

"I met new friends, loved the activities and the food was amazing!"

## Key points:

The Allergy 250K camps are successful at increasing confidence, because they:

- connect teens with other teens living with severe allergies;
- provide allergy education in a supportive environment
- facilitate informal conversations between the teens and health professionals, helping them to understand how to manage their allergy
- connect teens with Allergy 250K peer mentors who they can learn from and
- provide an opportunity for them to be independent from their parents and having a positive experience.

## Results

The camps have been successful in connecting 10-17 year olds and helping them form new connections and friendships and improving their knowledge and understanding of their allergies. The program includes adventure activities that require teamwork. The activities help them connect, support each other and form friendships. The allergy education sessions give campers the opportunity to learn, share experiences and further engage with the Allergy 250K peer mentors. These activities also help to improve their knowledge and increase confidence in managing their allergy.

**Table 1** shows the level of increased confidence in different aspects of managing their allergy, particularly food allergy, for each camp. Participants had the option to answer 'not at all', 'a little' or 'very much'. Overall, the camps have increased confidence 'very much' across all measures, with the greatest impacts highlighted in orange. The Melbourne camp has had the greatest impact on anxiety. This is the only camp where the psychologist held a group session specifically on recognising and managing anxiety.

## Areas for improvement

Every Allergy 250K camp is evaluated to enable the National Allergy Council to continue to improve the experience for school aged teens living with severe allergies. The campsite location and available activities are important to the success of the camp. There are now camp facility guidelines to support camp venue selection.

"Definitely feel more comfortable knowing that there are other people out there with the same allergies as me."

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