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allergy AWARE

Reducing the risk of allergic reactions (including anaphylaxis) **in Children's Education and Care services**

ascia australasian society of clinical immunology and allergy

national allergy council

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia

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About this document

This document has been developed by the National Allergy Council, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA). It is based on expert opinion and available published literature. The information contained in this document is not intended to replace medical advice and any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment, should be directed to a medical practitioner.

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https://allergyaware.org.au/childrens-education-and-care/manage-anaphylaxis-risk

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Introduction

Allergies are common in young children. Food allergy is estimated to affect around 1 in 10 infants, and 1 in 20 young children. Other children may be allergic to insect stings or bites, mould, latex, pollens or animal dander.

This document provides examples of strategies that Early Children's Education and Care (CEC) services can use to reduce the risk of children being exposed to their known allergens. It should be read alongside the recommendations and implementation guide in the National Allergy Council's Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management in Children's Education and Care.

Training

- All staff have a role in anaphylaxis prevention and management and should know how to recognise and respond to anaphylaxis. It is recommended that all staff undertake anaphylaxis training at least every two years. The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) anaphylaxis e-training is freely available.
- Following food allergen management protocols and procedures reduce the risk of a child with food allergy being given their food allergen. It is recommended that anyone who plans, makes or serves food or supervises meals or drinks in CEC services should complete the All About Allergens for CEC free online training and read the Managing Food Allergies in Children's Education and Care Kitchen Handbook. This includes managers, educators, cooks, chefs and volunteers.

Policies and Documentation

- CEC services should have an anaphylaxis management policy, a food allergy policy, and procedures for food allergen management.
- Audit the service regularly to check that policies and procedures are being followed consistently throughout the service.
- All parents of children with known allergies attending the CEC service must provide an ASCIA Action Plan completed and signed by their child's doctor or nurse practitioner. Use the same approach for all types of food allergies, regardless of the type of ASCIA Action Plan the child has.
- CEC services should work with families to decide which strategies are appropriate for each child and be aware that measures may differ depending on the age and developmental ability of the individual child. Document these strategies in the child's individualised anaphylaxis care plan, and communicate them to staff, families and the broader CEC community where appropriate.
- Parents should not be asked to sign disclaimers or waivers about possible exposure to food allergens while their child is at a CEC service.

An allergy aware approach

An allergy aware approach uses many strategies to lower the chance of a child with allergies to any food having food or drink they are allergic to.

The National Allergy Council recommends setting up food service systems that will support the CEC service as they provide food for children with food allergies. The Allergy Aware website contains links to the forms and tools referred to in bold throughout this document.

- Banning food allergens and using terms such as 'nut free' is not an effective way to manage food allergies in CEC services. Food bans do not help children with allergies to other foods.
- CEC services may restrict peanuts and tree nuts (such as cashew, hazelnut and almond) in their menu as a risk reduction strategy. This is because peanut and nut pastes are sticky and can be transferred from hands to toys and other surfaces. Whole or large pieces of peanut and tree nuts are choking risks.
- Foods that provide essential nutrients in children's diets such as wheat, cow's milk (dairy) and egg should not be removed from CEC services – children who are not allergic to them should still be offered these foods.

Documentation

At enrolment, ask families about their child's allergies and any other dietary needs and document this information.

- The Food Standards Code requires food service providers to give the right information about allergens in the food and drinks served to children, when asked.
- If a child has several food allergies, or complex food needs, families may need to provide food and drinks from home.

Meals and mealtimes

Preparing and serving food safely

Know what is in the food (recipes and food allergens)

- Use **standard recipes** – Recipes that everyone follows exactly. No changes, no additions.
- Use a **food allergen menu matrix** so that staff know which allergens are in your recipes and the food products used in the service. Keep the food allergen matrix up to date.
- Subscribe to food safety recalls so the service is notified about products recalled due to undeclared allergens. Do not use recalled foods in the menu.
- Do not serve foods with precautionary allergen labelling ('may be present' or 'may contain traces') statements for a child's food allergen. For example, a product labelled 'may be present: peanut, tree nuts', should not be given to a child with a peanut or tree nut allergy.

Know which children are present on which day

- Know which children with food allergy will be present for each meal and snack time. Complete a **record of food allergy and special dietary needs form** when a child is enrolled and update it if the child's food allergies change.
- Use a **daily attendance sheet** that lists the name of each child that is attending on that day and which meals and snacks they will be present for, and shows which children have food allergies and other special dietary needs.

Avoiding cross-contamination

Make and store food for children with food allergies in ways that avoid cross contamination with allergens from other foods. This includes:

- Cleaning benches, utensils, equipment and hands well before making food, in between food handling tasks, before and after handling a food allergen.
- Making food for children with food allergy at a different time or in a different space so their food does not contact other foods being prepared.
- If food is to be stored before it is given to the child, it must be clearly labelled with the child's first and last name and their allergy and covered to avoid contact with other food.

Have systems in place to make sure the right food is given to the right child

- Meals, snacks and drinks for children with food allergy must be labelled with the child's first and last name and their allergy.
- Have a clear way of identifying meals for children with food allergy – for example a coloured plate, or different shaped plate.
- The cook should hand over meals for children with food allergy first to a staff member who knows the child – use the **meal sign off form for allergies and special dietary needs** for this handover, signed by the staff member supervising the meal.
- Serve children with food allergy first, before other children. Children with food allergies should only be supervised by staff who know them well, and who have completed the All about Allergens for CEC online food allergen management training.
- Two staff should check and sign off that the right food is given to the right child with food allergy. Use the **meal sign off form for allergies and special dietary needs** to confirm that the right meal is given to the right child. Use the same process if second helpings of meals and snacks are available.
- Have a plan (such as a meal in a freezer labelled with the child's first and last name and their allergy) in case a meal is dropped or contaminated with an allergen.

Shared foods

- Shared platters of food, and self-serving of food are not recommended due to the risk of contact with a child's food allergen. Only offer children with food allergy food from shared platters if everything on the platter is suitable for their allergies.
- An option is to give each child with food allergies their own plate of food (labelled with their name and allergy) to serve themselves from.

Drinks

- Supervise all children when they are drinking so they only drink from their own water bottle or cup.
- Give children with food allergies different coloured cups, labelled with their first and last name.
- If serving milk drinks, pour and serve milk drinks for children with milk allergy first. Two staff members should check that the right milk is given to the right child.
- Using cups with lids reduces the risk of spills.

Food and drinks from home

- All lunch and snack boxes, water bottles, bottles of infant formula and other alternative milks should be clearly labelled with the child's first and last name.
- Store lunch boxes and water bottles belonging to children with food allergy separately (for example, on a set shelf of the fridge, or with their bag).
- Ask all parents not to pack messy foods (such as grated cheese, tubs of yoghurt, egg sandwiches) and sticky foods (such as peanut or tree nut spreads) if there are children with cow's milk (dairy), egg or nut allergies enrolled at the service.
- CEC services that are lunch box services should have systems in place to ensure that children only eat food from their own lunch box.
- Children should always be supervised when they are eating and drinking.

Breakfast and extra meals and snacks

Pay special attention when providing breakfast and other meals and snacks that occur outside of routine meal and snack times.

- Always use a **daily attendance sheet** that lists the name of each child that is attending on that day and which meals and snacks (including breakfast) they will be present for, and shows which children have food allergies and other special dietary needs. Educators and other staff should not rely on their memory.
- All meals and snacks for children with food allergies should be planned by a staff member who has completed All about Allergens for CEC food allergen management training.
- Two person checks are required when giving food and drinks to children with food allergies. Use the **meal sign off form for allergies and special dietary needs** to confirm that the right meal is given to the right child.
- Breakfast and Snack Boxes.
  - Some CEC services use breakfast or snack boxes that contain suitable foods for each child with food allergies. Label box with the child's first and last name, their food allergies, the food it contains and the ingredients. If the child has a cow's milk allergy, a suitable milk alternative should be clearly listed on the box.
- Breakfast Trolleys.
  - Some CEC services use a separate breakfast trolley or a different space when making and serving food for children with food allergies.
- Spreads and toppings.
  - Check the ingredients of spreads and toppings.
  - Use portion packs or individual serves of spreads and toppings to lower the risk of contamination with other foods (such as other spreads or crumbs).

Infant formula

- It is important that children with food allergies are given the right formula, and there is no contamination of their formula when it is made up. Pages 19/20 of the Managing Food Allergies in Children's Education and Care Kitchen Handbook outlines steps to take when managing infant formula for children with cow's milk and other food allergies.
- Two staff members should check that the right infant formula is given to the right child. Use the **form for infant formula and expressed breast milk** to help staff check and document that the right formula is made and given to the right child.
- Always hold babies when offering them infant formula or milk. Never leave them alone with a bottle.

Other notes about meal and snack times

Handwashing

- Everyone (all children and staff) should wash their hands with soap and running water **before** and **after** eating.
- Check the soap or handwash does not contain any food allergens (such as goat milk or nut oils).
- If soap and running water is not available, clean hands (and faces) with baby wipes or individual face washers that are machine washed after each use.
- Hand sanitiser does not remove allergens and should not be used instead of washing hands with soap and water.

During meal and snack times

Children with food allergies should only be supervised by staff who know them well, and who have completed the All about Allergens for CEC online food allergen management training. This is to ensure that food is not swapped, and to clean up spills quickly.

- Children should always sit down when they eat and drink.
- Children with food allergies should still be able to sit with other children. Where children with additional behavioural or developmental needs make this difficult, CEC services may choose to have allergen-restricted spaces where children with food allergies can eat or offer different mealtimes when groups of children eat.
- Children should not share food, or eat food from each other's plates, bowls, cups, bottles or cutlery, or drink from anyone else's cup or drink bottle.

- Some foods are messier than others. Take care when serving foods and drinks such as milk and other dairy foods (such as yoghurt) that may splash onto surfaces such as tables, chairs and the floor. Watch for spills and clean them up quickly.
- Children with food allergies should not scrape food bowls into a food scraps bucket. This is to reduce the risk of contact with other foods.
- Clothes that have had food spills on them should be changed immediately after the meal.

Progressive mealtimes

- Clean the eating space before a child with food allergies eat.
- When children are not all eating at the same time, plan carefully to make sure that children with food allergies are given the right meal when it is their turn to eat. Encourage children with food allergies to eat during the first meal setting.

Highchairs

- If the CEC service uses highchairs, the highchair needs to be thoroughly cleaned after each child has used it.
- Wipe the highchair down before the child with food allergy uses it.

Cleaning during and after mealtimes

- Clean food and drink spills immediately. This reduces the risk of a child with food allergy having contact with their allergen.
- Have a spill kit nearby with a bucket, paper towel, cloth or sponge, wipes, detergent spray and gloves. Wash any used cloths or sponges before using again.
- Wipe surfaces of tables, chairs and highchairs thoroughly with hot soapy water after meals.
- Clean up posits/vomit quickly and thoroughly as they can contain food allergens.
- Bare surfaces are easier to keep clean. Avoid tablecloths as they can soak up and hide food and milk spills.

Toys:

- Children should not handle toys while they are eating.
- Children must wash their hands after eating to lower the chance that toys will be contaminated with food allergens.
- If a toy is mouthed by a child, it must be cleaned well before it is used by another child.

Consider the needs of children with food allergy when planning other activities in the CEC service

- Minimising exposure to food allergens during educational activities, not just at mealtimes.
- Wash toys and equipment regularly with hot soapy water.
- Plan games and activities (including sensory food exploration and cooking activities) so that they do not contain any foods that children are allergic to.
- Talk to families before planning food-based activities. Known food allergens should be substituted with other ingredients – families of children with food allergy can provide advice about suitable alternatives, as can the allergy trained staff in your kitchen.

Craft

- Do not use recycled items that may contain food allergens for craft (such as empty plastic milk bottles, egg cartons, cereal boxes, empty peanut and tree nut butter jars, ice cream containers).
- Do not use food items (such as nut husks or shells, eggshells or pasta) for craft or sensory play.
- Some products such as play dough contain food allergens such as wheat or nut oils. For children with wheat allergy, consider making wheat free play dough using wheat free flour. If a child with food allergy cannot use the play dough, provide an alternative for the child to use and supervise all children to avoid cross contamination. Clean play dough tools very well before and after use.
- Activities that include skin contact (such as face painting or making masks moulded to a child's face) should be discussed for suitability with families before the activity. This is because the products used may contain food allergens such as peanut, tree nut, wheat, milk or egg.
- Wind instruments (such as whistles and recorders) are high risk and are best avoided in CEC settings.

Sunscreen

- Do not use sunscreen containing any food products (such as nut oils, cow's or goat's milk).
- Families may provide a preferred sunscreen for their child.

Kitchen gardens

- Children may be allergic to foods grown in the garden (people can be allergic to any food including fruits and vegetables). Discuss options with families of children with food allergy when planning what you will plant.
- Garden mulch and compost can contain food allergens (such as peanut shells). Source mulch that does not contain food.

Activities with animals

- Children with egg allergy should only handle chicks that hatched the previous day or longer (no wet feathers) and must wash their hands afterwards. Further information is available from Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.
- Some animal feed contains food allergens (such as nuts in birdseed and cow feed, milk and egg in dog food, fish in fish food, peanut butter in dog food, fish in cat food). If possible, source animal feed that does not contain foods that children are allergic to.
- Excursions that involve contact with a child's allergen should be avoided. For example, do not plan an excursion to a dairy farm that includes milking cows as an activity when you are caring for children with milk allergy.

Special events and off-site activities: planning and communication

- Children should not miss out on activities because of their allergies. The National Allergy Council Anaphylaxis checklist for CEC: Preparing for off-site activities (events, excursions, sporting activities) has been designed to help develop risk management plans with risk minimisation strategies specific to anaphylaxis for off-site activities.
- Special events that involve food are high risk for children with food allergy.
    - Consider children with food allergy when planning excursions, fundraisers, cultural days or stalls, breakfast mornings, picnics and other celebrations involving food.
    - Children with food allergy can participate in birthday celebrations if their families supply foods that are appropriate for their child's food allergies. Examples include a 'treat box' or cupcakes that may be stored frozen in a sealed container labelled with the child's first and last name and their allergy.
    - Children with food allergy should not consume any food brought in by other children or their families even if they are thought to be safe.

Other Allergies

Allergies to insect bites and stings

- Ensure children with insect allergy wear shoes when outside.
- Cover outdoor bins as they attract insects.
- Specify play areas that are lower risk – away from garden beds, flowering plants, water, or garbage storage areas.
- Keep lawns and clover mowed.
- Consider poisoning ant nests.
- When purchasing plants, consider those less likely to attract bees and wasps (such as non-flowering plants).

Bees and wasps

- Have bee and wasp nests removed professionally.
- Be aware of bees around water and in grassed or garden areas.
- Do not have open drink containers outside, particularly those containing sweet drinks, as they may attract wasps.

Tick allergy

- In tick prone areas, to reduce the risk of tick bites, children should wear a hat and cover their skin when outdoors.
- Tuck children's pants into their socks and wear long sleeved tops if possible.
- Protective clothing should be removed before going indoors.
- CEC services located in tick prone areas should keep an ether containing spray for tick removal in their first aid kit.

Animal allergy

- Exposure to animals such as domestic dogs, cats, rabbits, rats, mice, guinea pigs and horses may trigger contact dermatitis (rashes), eczema, allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and sometimes asthma.
- Some CEC services have therapy support animals that visit the site. This should be discussed with families at enrolment, and any plans to manage exposure to the animal should be documented in the child's individual allergy care plan.
- Anaphylaxis to animals such as horses or dogs is rare but may occur and should be considered with activities such as "show and tell", or visits to farms or zoos.

Other Allergies

Latex allergy

- Use non-latex gloves at nappy changing stations, in first aid kits and in kitchens.
- Food for children with latex allergy should be prepared with clean hands or non-latex gloves.
- Non-latex balloons should be used when there is a child with latex allergy.
- First aid kits should have non-latex sticking plasters and non-latex gloves available.

Mould allergy

- Garden mulch and compost can contain mould allergens. Store mulch in a dry place to minimise the growth of moulds.

Medications and skin creams

- Any medication administered in the CEC service should be given in accordance with service guidelines, policy and procedures.
- Do not use skin products that contain food in their ingredients. Sunscreen, soaps, handwash, nappy creams, moisturisers may contain food products including nut oils, cow's or goat's milk.
- Encourage families of children with food allergy to supply their own skin products or ask them to check the ingredients of CEC service supplies.
- Staff do not have to restrict the types of skin creams and/or makeup they use at home.

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