

Managing Allergies in Early Years settings

What is an allergy?

An allergy is a reaction the body has to a particular food or substance. They are very common affecting more than a quarter of the population in the UK. They are particularly common in children, and whilst some allergies go away as a child gets older, others may be lifelong. Equally, whilst having a mild allergic reaction can be a nuisance affecting a child's everyday activities, reactions for some may be extremely serious and present a real danger to life.

How serious can allergies be?

Anaphylaxis is the term for a severe, rapidly-occurring allergic reaction. Severe allergic reactions among young children are uncommon, but when they do occur they must be treated rapidly. Symptoms may include:

- itching in the mouth
- swelling of the face, throat or tongue
- asthma
- difficulty in talking or swallowing
- hives anywhere on the body
- generalised flushing of the skin
- abdominal cramps and nausea
- "floppiness" caused by a drop in blood pressure
- collapse and unconsciousness.

A child at risk of anaphylaxis will often be prescribed injectable adrenaline (also known as epinephrine) and the child's parents may request that members of staff are trained in how to administer it in an emergency. Pre-loaded injections (such as EpiPen, Anapen or Jext) are designed to be easy to administer, though regular training is needed to ensure the correct technique is used. Oral antihistamines may also be prescribed and these can be used to treat milder reactions. **It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that medication is within its use-by date.**

What potential issues can arise from a child having allergies in my care?

Research indicates that up to 50% of children now have at least one diagnosed allergy. This has significant implications for early years providers and the care that they provide to young children. With new food allergen regulations also affecting nurseries and childminders, it is vital that childcare providers are able to deal with the responsibilities that childhood allergies pose.

The ability to understand allergic conditions and deal with sudden or severe symptoms is now becoming essential for early years providers. Allergic reactions occur when an individual's immune system responds inappropriately to the presence of a food or substance that it wrongly perceives as a threat. These substances are called allergens, and for most people they are harmless. Common allergens among children include:

- peanuts
- tree nuts
- milk
- eggs
- wheat
- fish
- insect stings
- penicillin or other drugs
- pollens
- house dust mites.

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Allergic symptoms can affect the nose, throat, ears, eyes, airways, digestions and skin in mild, moderate or severe form.

Information sharing

Obtaining accurate, up-to-date information about all known allergies is key to caring for young children in early years provisions. Parents should be asked for information about their child's allergies before they start at the childcare provision. The EYFS statutory framework states that before a child is admitted "the provider must also obtain information about any special dietary requirements, preferences and food allergies that the child has, and any special health requirements. Providers must record and act on information from parents and carers about a child's dietary needs."

Good communication is vital and it is recommended that providers work in consultation with parents and any relevant healthcare professionals to write an allergy management plan for each individual child.

Allergy management plan

An allergy management plan details how the child's allergies will be managed on a day-to-day basis and what to do in the event of an allergic reaction. It means that everyone involved in the child's care is aware of any allergies and requirements. It also acts as a reference point for new or temporary staff.

The allergy management plan should be held on the premises and a further copy kept with the child's medication. The plan should include the following information.

- The child's details – name, address and date of birth.
- Contact details – telephone and mobile numbers of a parent or guardian and another emergency contact.
- Contact details of the family GP.
- A list of the child's specific allergies and what to avoid.
- A list of possible symptoms.
- Prescribed medication – how often the treatment should be given and who will be responsible for giving it.
- Details of emergency procedures, including an assessment of symptoms, when and how to administer medication, contact numbers and the ambulance procedure.
- A list of staff members who have been trained, including the date of their last training.
- Consent and agreement – a parent or guardian must give written consent for staff to take responsibility for administering medication.

Research has shown that children whose allergies are managed with the help of a management plan are less likely to have severe reactions. The plan should be reviewed regularly and updated where necessary. A generic plan can be found [here](#).

Meals and snacks

Many early years providers and schools already have a nut-free policy and a policy in place to prohibit children sharing food. This helps to minimise risk to children with food allergies. A commitment to reading food labels and maintaining vigilance is essential. Regular cleaning of surfaces and hand washing are also important to reduce the risk of exposure to

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allergens. It is good practice to have a list of special dietary requirements for each child clearly displayed where food is being prepared. This acts as a constant reminder of all known allergies in the provision and provides a quick reference point for staff.

Food allergen regulations

[The EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation \(No. 1169/ 2011\)](#) came into force on 13 December 2014 and affects all early years provisions that offer meals and snacks. Childcare provisions must now provide accurate allergen information to parents, children and staff for every food and drink item that contains any of the following 14 allergens as ingredients.

- Eggs.
- Milk.
- Fish.
- Crustaceans (for example: crab, lobster, crayfish, shrimp, prawn).
- Molluscs (for example: mussels, oysters, squid).
- Peanuts.
- Tree nuts (almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecans, brazils, pistachios, macadamia nuts or Queensland nuts).
- Sesame seeds.
- Cereals containing gluten (wheat such as spelt, Khorasan wheat/Kamut), rye, barley, oats, or their hybridised strains).
- Soya.
- Celery and celeriac.
- Mustard.
- Lupin.
- Sulphur dioxide and sulphites (at concentration of more than ten parts per million).

The requirement to provide information on the presence of these allergens covers both meals cooked from scratch and pre-packaged items. This information can be provided by listing the allergens clearly in an obvious place such as a menu, chalkboard or information pack or alternatively by signposting parents and staff to where it could be obtained, either in written or oral formats. The legislation requires that the information provided is accurate, consistent and verifiable upon challenge. All staff should be aware of the policies and procedures regarding handling and communicating allergen information.

Activities and trips

Early years providers need to consider whether all the activities on offer are safe for children with allergies. Many craft activities can involve ingredients that could trigger an allergic response such as play dough or other art products. Cooking activities, nature tables and class pets can also be an issue. It is important that all children are included on any outings or trips, but staff must ensure that the risk of allergic reactions is minimised by planning in advance. Medication and allergy management plans must be taken on any outings and consideration needs to be given to the food and drinks provided.

Essential strategies

Early years managers need effective policies and procedures in place to deal with allergy management in their provision. These should be reviewed regularly and be available to all parents, carers and members of staff. Good practice includes the following.

- Obtaining all known allergy information from families prior to admitting a child to the provision

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- Ensure that all staff are aware of children and young people with severe allergies and that they know which allergens are involved
- Training all staff in allergen avoidance, early recognition of symptoms and crisis management. Specific staff members should be trained to administer emergency medication
- Ensuring allergy action plans are implemented
- Outlining clear guidance on nut-free policies and food sharing.
- Ensuring good communication with families affected by allergies and any relevant health professionals.
- Ensuring all allergen information relating to food and drinks provided is communicated to parents and staff and is accurate, consistent and verifiable.
- Maintaining strict food hygiene and cross-contamination standards throughout food handling areas. Ensuring any relevant medication is stored safely whilst being easily accessible to members of staff.
- Identifying known allergens in other substances or products used in the provision, such as arts and crafts materials.
- Keep a register of all children with allergies
- Ensure a detailed care plan is in place
- Complete a risk assessment for each child with an allergy
- Ensure that all children in the setting and their parents/carers are made aware of allergy risks
- Settings must refer to the DfE publication [Supporting children at school with medical conditions](#)

Desirable strategies

- All members of staff to be trained to administer emergency medication
- Children to be made aware of things that they need to avoid and develop their understanding of why

Useful information and resources

- [Allergy UK](#) is the leading national charity dedicated to supporting allergy sufferers in the UK.
- [Anaphylaxis campaign](#) is a UK charity supporting people with severe allergies.
- [PACEY](#) is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. It promotes best practice and supports childcare professionals to deliver high standards of care and learning.
- [Food Standards Agency](#) is an independent government department responsible for food safety and hygiene across the UK
- [Croner-i](#) the source of this information.