

Does your child's back-to-school list include an allergy action plan?

1 August 2014, by Evie Polsley

Backpacks. Crayons. Glue sticks. EpiPen? For more and more school-age children the EpiPen is becoming a necessity for completing the back-to-school supply list. In fact, allergic conditions are one of the most common medical conditions affecting children in the U.S.

"Accidental exposure to allergens at [school](#) is a major concern for kids with severe allergies since any exposure could be fatal," said Joyce Rabbat, MD, pediatric allergist at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Food allergies are the most concerning for school-age [children](#) since allergens can be hidden in food, utensils, pots or pans. These could be contaminated without the knowledge of the [child](#) or a supervising adult. Rabbat said that parents of children with food allergies should ensure an allergy action plan is in place at school.

"In the event of an accidental exposure, the plan helps school personnel manage the reaction in a prompt and effective way. This really could mean life or death to the child," Rabbat said.

Rabbat said a parent should make sure the school reviews the child's health records. She also suggested asking what the school does to prevent accidental exposure and whether staff members are trained to deal with emergencies.

If the child is older and knows how to self-administer medications, Rabbat suggested talking to the school about allowing children to carry the medication with them. If that is not allowed at the school, make sure the following medications are available:

- Epinephrine auto injectors
- Antihistamines
- Albuterol rescue inhalers

Also make sure a staff member, who is available at all times, is properly trained on how to administer medication and that your child is familiar with this person.

"Each child is different. Some children are extremely reactive to certain foods and in those cases additional precautions need to be taken. It is important the school staff members know how to manage a child's allergy and have an emergency response in place," Rabbat said.

In addition to other staff, it is imperative the child's teacher be aware of the child's allergies, knows the signs of an attack and is trained on how to respond because reactions can escalate quickly. Rabbat also suggested school bus drivers and afterschool program staff be alerted to the child's allergies and trained on how to respond in the event of an emergency.

According to Rabbat, the best way to keep a child with a [food allergy](#) safe is to educate the child.

"As soon as your child is diagnosed with a food allergy begin teaching him or her what to avoid. Talk about safe and unsafe foods and encourage them to never share food with friends or eat something with unknown ingredients," Rabbat said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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