

## Why “Peanut Free”?

### Why has my child’s school asked me to avoid sending peanuts or peanut products for lunches and snacks?

*Your child’s school is trying to become “peanut-safe” for a very important reason. There are children in your child’s grade level that have a documented life threatening peanut allergy. (See “The shocking facts about peanut allergies” sheet). A peanut allergy is usually severe and can be fatal. **Unfortunately peanut products do not have to be ingested to cause a life threatening reaction to kids with severe peanut allergies. Even trace amounts of peanut residue on desks, books, drinking fountains, door handles, playground equipment, computer keyboards, etc... can cause someone with a peanut allergy to have a severe reaction.***

***Without treatment the child could die within minutes.** That’s why your help and cooperation are very important. The most important thing you can do is avoid sending any foods from home that may contain even traces of peanuts or peanut products for lunches and snacks.*

### What makes peanut allergies more serious than other food allergies?

*Many people have food intolerances that result in discomfort and mild physical symptoms. **For those with severe food allergies, coming into contact with even trace amounts of an allergic food can cause a potentially life threatening or fatal reaction. Peanut allergies differ from other food allergies in that their reactions are often more immediate, unpredictable, severe and unfortunately in many cases fatal.** It is estimated that approximately 30,000 emergency rooms visits annually are due to reactions to peanut allergens and 300 people die annually from anaphylactic reactions from contact with peanut protein, many of these children and young adults.*

### Why do I have to adapt what food my kids bring to school because your child has a peanut allergy?

*The simple answer to this question is because we can’t keep our kids safe without you. As parents of severely allergic kids, we have gone to great lengths to ensure that our child is educated on the severity of their peanut allergy and know what foods they can safely consume. We have also ensured that any person taking care of our child is fully aware of the seriousness of their food allergy and have been trained in emergency medical procedures.*

***Unfortunately many serious and fatal allergic responses have been the result of a contaminated environment. These individuals have simply touched surfaces that have trace peanut residue on them. Unknowingly other kids can leave a dangerous trail of peanut residue on every surface they may touch***

***after eating peanut products. Our kids have to simply touch the same surface and a potentially life threatening reaction can occur. Truly the only way to eliminate a potentially fatal outcome for a child with severe peanut allergy is to address what food can be brought into the school environment.***

## **How do I know what food contains peanut or peanut product?**

***It is critical that you read the labels for any food products brought into the school environment. Products that contain peanuts include everything from peanut butter, many granola bars, power bars, trail mix, chex mix, cracker Jacks, many chocolate and candy products, and many packaged snack crackers. Even if peanuts are not listed in the ingredients, trace amounts of peanuts can make their way into the product through the manufacturing process. (See below)***

**Some products say “manufactured in a factory or on equipment that process peanuts” or labels sometimes say “May Contain Traces of Peanuts and/or Nuts”.  
What does that mean?**

*It means that even if the food does not have peanuts in it on purpose, it may have come in contact with peanuts and it is not safe for a person with a peanut allergy. A product might come in contact with peanuts if it's made in a factory that also makes other products that do contain peanuts. Many severe and fatal reactions have been the result of products that have been cross contaminated with peanut dust or residue from factory equipment that was used to produce peanut products. (I.E. Plain M & Ms' are manufactured in the same factory as Peanut M & M's, therefore they are not a 'safe' snack for an allergic child)*

***Allergen information is generally well marked around an ingredient list for most products. To determine if an item is 'safe', first check the ingredient list for peanuts and then look to the allergen information section for any cross contamination information.***

## **Why are store or home baked goods an issue?**

*Because store bought baked goods offer no documented ingredients and can become cross contaminated by bowls, utensils and baking pans that were used for peanut products, they are considered unsafe. The same cross contamination issues could exist in any home baked goods as well. **When bringing in treats to be shared with the class, the best “baked” snacks are ones from the store that are well labeled and tightly packaged.***

## **Aren't "Peanut free" areas and classes creating an artificial environment and not representative of the 'real world' that kids with peanut allergies will need to live in?**

Actually the school environment is the one place where severely allergic children are surrounded on any given day by hundreds of peanut products at one time. ***No other environment that they will live in later in life, or outside the school walls, will be so dominated by peanut sandwiches and snack goods.*** Unfortunately, because contaminated surfaces cause many severe and fatal reactions, risk for school age allergic children is overwhelming. Through efforts to minimize the amount of peanut products brought into the school, educating other parents and their children to the dangers peanut product present, and providing safeguards like hand washing after eating lunch, school administrators are trying to minimize the risk factors and make the environment less toxic for kids with severe peanut allergies.

## **At what point are kids who are allergic to peanuts in charge of their own safety?**

*This is a question that the family of a severely allergic child asks themselves every day. We have gone to great lengths to communicate the severity of their food allergy to our children. We have taught them not to share food with anyone else, to wash their hands before ever touching their face, and to politely decline when offered foods they are not sure are 'safe'. We have role played scenarios with our kids about how to handle situations where they knowingly come into contact with peanut products, what to do if they feel any symptoms, and to always ensure that they have their emergency EpiPen with them.*

***What we cannot do is help them to know where any and all trace, potentially life threatening, (yet invisible), amounts of peanut residue may be. There is not even a clear answer as to when a child is able to administer his own emergency medication at the onset of a reaction because many people lose consciousness at the beginning of an anaphylactic reaction. In many ways we will be relying on the actions of other parents, authority figures, friends of our children and maybe even complete strangers to keep our kids safe and alive.***

***Please understand that on any given day, it feels like our kids are walking through a land mine field and we desperately need your help to ensure they safely make it home at the end of the day.***

***Thank you for keeping our kids safe.***

### Recent deaths from Peanut allergies:

- *In a chilling study from Johns Hopkins University, 13 children with life threatening nut allergies were followed for a year. During the course of the study six of them died. **All 6 of these children had come into contact with peanut residue at their various schools.***
- *A teenager at a summer camp collapsed and died in her mother's arms outside the school gym after eating a grilled cheese sandwich in the cafeteria made with a knife that had also been used to make a peanut butter sandwich.*
- *A child in Ontario collapsed and died after coming into contact with peanut residue on the school playground equipment during a 15 minute recess.*
- *A young girl recently died from a 'free' chocolate chip cookie that was being given out as a sample at a grocery store. Though peanuts were not in the ingredients, it had been manufactured in a factory that produced peanut products.*
- *An 8 year old boy dies at a Super Bowl Party after coming into contact with peanut residue on a TV remote control after it was touched by an individual who had eaten peanuts.*