

SHAB Member Request to Review Guidelines regarding life-threatening allergies – DRAFT

Summary of relevant guidelines

- 1) ACPS permits food to be brought into classrooms and elsewhere in school buildings by anyone. Neither ACPS Wellness Guidelines (JHCF-R) nor ACPS Food Allergy Guidelines (JHCF-R2) prohibit outside food or restrict foods known to be highly allergenic:

JHCF-R2 states schools should: *“Minimize the use of food in classroom with the exception of healthy snacks brought from home for personal consumption by the student.”*

JHCF-R states: *“Consumption of food in the classroom is to be discouraged due to allergy and sanitation concerns.”*

- 2) JHCF-R2 only directs Administrators to communicate with families and/or eliminate specific allergens at the elementary school level:

“13. At the elementary level, provide guidelines for monitoring snacks and lunch:

- a. Send a letter to parents stating that food other than lunches and healthy snacks intended for student’s own consumption are not be brought into schools (except for special circumstances, such as the student who requires snacks at regular intervals due to a health condition).*
- b. Establish within cafeterias eating areas/designated tables for the consumption of specific foods, as needed.*
- c. Create flexibility in grouping students during the lunch period to limit exposure to potential allergens.*
- d. Eliminate specific potential allergens, if necessary, to protect food allergic students.”*

- 3) JHCF-R2 expects secondary school students to be more involved in managing their own care, but does not define what a “shift” in guidelines means.

“In order to assist children with life-threatening allergies to assume more individual responsibility for maintaining their safety, these guidelines will shift as children advance through the primary grades and through secondary school.”

Concerns

ACPS has a culture of teachers handing out or allowing food in classes and asking families to bring food to share at school-sponsored activities (e.g. plays, bands/chorus, clubs, sports, etc.). Teachers routinely give out treats or have meals as rewards (also a violation of Wellness Guidelines aimed at good nutritional goals). Many school-sponsored activities serve meals or request that parents prepare meals. There is no routine practice of communication about life-threatening allergies in these situations.

Suggestions

- 1) Include secondary schools and school-sponsored activities (e.g. plays, bands/chorus, clubs, sports, etc.) in JHCF-R2's Administrator responsibilities.
- 2) In practice, many elementary school administrators routinely send letters to relevant families saying a child in proximity to their child has a life-threatening specific allergy and request that families refrain from bringing in the allergenic food. This should be a guideline, not a practice, and secondary schools and advisors of school-sponsored activities at all grade levels should be expected to do the same.
- 3) Educate all Administrators that JHCF-R2 gives them the option of "eliminating specific allergens" which means Administrators can choose to create peanut-free schools if school clinicians deem it medically appropriate for any student's safety.
- 4) Establish guidelines requiring a parent-signed permission slip in advance when a meal will be served in school or at a school-sponsored activity. Allow families sufficient time to communicate awareness of a life-threatening allergy and to bring an appropriate meal from home.

Challenges

If there is a middle or high school student with a life-threatening allergy, it could mean an administrator sending a letter to all students in a large school and to all students in any activity in which an allergic student participates (plays, bands/chorus, clubs, sports, etc.). That is tough. However, it is flawed to assume just because a student is older they can protect themselves. If a student becomes unconscious due to an extreme reaction, they cannot help themselves. It is best to advocate prevention as a first line defense and to ensure adults supervising are already aware of specific life-threatening allergies in order to respond with proper immediate care. Just because something is hard to do doesn't mean you don't do it, especially when dealing with life-threatening situations.