

Nut Restricted Schools

Questions & Answers

What are the different options schools have regarding nuts in schools?

The Farmington Public Schools Board policy reads, “Food allergies can be life threatening. The District is committed to offering safe educational environments for all students including students with food allergies. Cooperative efforts between students, parents, physicians, and school staff members can help minimize risks. Accordingly, the Superintendent shall direct the development of procedures that will outline proactive and required responses related to issues of food allergies.” When a school learns that a child with a severe nut allergy is enrolling, the school will work with the parents and a pediatric allergist to determine the precautions and procedures needed to be put in place to support this child’s safety and well-being. Depending on the severity of the allergy, a school will work in collaboration with the family and the pediatric allergist to implement precautions and procedures to protect the child. Farmington Public Schools has two general categories that currently are used to label a school’s nut handling level, these include:

- Lower Exposure Risk: Nut Awareness level (i.e. a nut-free table in the cafeteria, nut-free classrooms, extra hand-washing)
- Higher Exposure Risk: Nut Restricted level (i.e. restrict access of all nuts into the school at all times)

What are the different ways students with nut allergies are at risk?

Children with allergies to tree nuts and/or peanuts can have an allergic reaction through contact, airborne and/or ingestion. A reaction can occur by touching a nut (contact), having the allergen enter through inhalation (airborne) and/or by eating a food item that contains nut, even trace amounts (ingestion). Some children with nut allergies will have an allergic reaction through ingestion only, while others’ will include a reaction by contact, airborne and/or ingestion.

What determines whether a school will be Nut Restricted?

The school works with the parents and the pediatric allergist to determine the child’s allergy severity level, their risk of exposure and precautions a school needs to take. A decision for a school to go to a Nut Restricted level is based on the following:

- the child’s allergic reaction severity
- how the child’s reaction is triggered (airborne, ingestion, contact)
- the allergic reaction history of the child
- the age of the child

Based on the information from the above areas, a school will determine the necessary restriction level.

Generally, why aren’t middle schools or high schools Nut Restricted?

Pediatric allergists generally suggest that as students with severe allergies enter middle school, they are much more independent and therefore become more capable of self-monitoring their allergy. Therefore, middle and high schools, often times, can have less

restriction and support more of a Nut Awareness Level (i.e. nut free table in the cafeteria, nut free classrooms).

Do before and after school groups (Y-Care, Scouts, Enrichments, Community Education, etc) need to heed the Nut Restriction efforts even if there are no students with nut allergies participating in a particular group?

Yes, all people in a Nut Restricted school, before, during and after school hours, are asked to follow the Nut Restricted efforts by being extra vigilant to ensure no nut containing products enter the school for the safety of the students with nut allergies. This is due to cross-contact issues that can result with nut oils/residue left on surfaces. For example, if a child with a nut allergy is exposed to even a small amount of nut or nut oils/residue left on surfaces, a reaction can occur from this very small amount of peanut residue coming in contact with a child. Peanut and nut residue that is oily can remain on surfaces for a long period of time. Each time a child is exposed, (even if a reaction doesn't occur) their risk to a more severe reaction increases. Therefore, every effort to protect these children is required. In a small number of cases, children with nut allergies can outgrow the allergy, but only with strict avoidance, many pediatric allergists believe.

Does the Nut Restriction include off-campus events like Bonaventure Skate Nights, Dairy Queen Family Night, Zap Zone Nights, etc.?

No. Our school community cannot coordinate or plan for the Nut Restriction at off-campus sites for school events or PTA events. Therefore, nut products may be found at these types of school-related off-campus events. Our school community cannot plan a nut-restricted environment off-campus for school or PTA events. Therefore, nut products may be found at these types of school-related off-campus events. If it's an event that our PTA is using as a fundraiser by selling items, we do ask that our parent volunteers remain mindful to not plan for nut containing items being served while there.

What are the types of allergic reactions a child with a severe tree nut/ peanut allergy can have?

Allergic reactions can range from mild to severe to life threatening (anaphylaxis). Mild reactions can include a skin reaction like hives, redness or swelling, upset stomach and wheezing. A severe to life threatening allergic reaction can range from difficulty breathing, to shock and loss of consciousness. *A life threatening reaction is defined as anaphylaxis which means a serious allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death.*

Can students without nut allergies bring in foods whose labels say, "Processed in a facility that also produces nuts" or "processed on a machine that also processes nuts" or "may include nuts"?

- Food labels that say: "Processed in a facility that also processes nuts" or "Processed on a machine that also processes nuts" (or similar wording) are OK to bring to school for personal consumption. Examples: *California Pizza Kitchen Cheese Pizza label states, "Contains: Wheat, Milk, Soy. Manufactured on equipment that processes peanuts."*

- Food labels that say, “May contain peanut or tree nuts” (or similar wording) are NOT OK to bring to school to eat. Examples: *Quaker Granola Bars Smores flavor label states, “May Contain Traces of Peanuts”*.
- If labels have no allergy information those food items, in most circumstances, are considered OK for children without nut allergies to consume in school. However, these food items that are not labeled with allergy information should not be given to children with nut allergies.

Why don’t school districts have one school designated for “children with nut allergies” to attend?

A public school is required to provide all children a safe learning environment and accommodate physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs as needed. Providing a separate school for children with allergies is a form of discrimination. The district’s non-discrimination policy reads, “The District shall not discriminate against any person based on race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, height, weight, or marital status in any of its programs, services, activities or employment.” A food allergy is considered a medical disability.

What will happen if a student or parent forgets and brings in a nut product to school for lunch or snack?

While we want to remain vigilant, we understand that this may happen on occasion. If a student brings a nut product to school, we simply use a *Ziploc* bag to immediately bag the item with a reminder label that says, “Gill is a Nut Restricted School, Please Enjoy this Food Item at Home.” Then we send the item home with the child at dismissal. If the item is a large part of a student’s lunch, we have some nut-free healthy food items in the office and cafeteria that we give to the student.

How can I explain to my child that nuts aren’t allowed in their school, especially when all he/she will eat is peanut butter?

Empathy and compassion are the key elements here, with a feeling of good fortune that your own child doesn’t suffer from this potentially life-threatening allergy. Help your child understand that while some allergies can be a nuisance with low level reactions (i.e. stuffed-up noses and sneezing) students who suffer from peanut allergies can have very dangerous, even life-threatening reactions. Explain to your child that by not bringing nut products to school, he/she is helping take care of, keep safe, and even protect these students with nut allergies. Children will feel proud to be able to help out in this way, as well as maybe even feeling a bit fortunate that they don’t suffer from this allergy.

Can my child bring nut products on field trips? What if no children who are allergic to nuts are attending the trip?

Since the food items still come into the school in the morning and to limit cross contact opportunities, we are asking for this nut restriction be applied to all field trips as well.

What about birthday treats?

As a general health and wellness effort, we suggest parents or guardians consider non-food related birthday items for enjoyment in school (i.e. giving out pencils, buttons,

goodie bags, students singing a picture as a memoir, etc.). However, all food related nut-free treats brought from home or a store should have a clear ingredients label and be checked in at the office prior to sending down to the classroom.

What are some resources that are available to help families support this effort and give them ideas on nut alternatives?

“Nut Free” Snack Ideas by Brand Name:

http://www.farmington.k12.mi.us/gil/pdf/nut_free.pdf

Peanut & Nut Free Lunch, Snack and Treat Ideas:

<http://www.farmington.k12.mi.us/gil/pdf/lunch.pdf>

Nut Free Candy Ideas:

<http://www.farmington.k12.mi.us/gil/pdf/candy.pdf>

Food Allergy Anaphylactic Network:

<http://www.foodallergy.org/>