

Information for Families of Food-Allergic Children at Bird Rock Elementary

What are the San Diego Unified School District policies regarding food allergies at school?

The district asks schools to identify children with food allergies, develop anaphylaxis action plans, collect forms for medications at school, store forms and the emergency medications (such as epinephrine) in an accessible but secure location, and train staff in the identification of allergic reactions and administration of epinephrine auto-injectors. The district can provide signs for nut-free classrooms and tables. Food and Nutrition Services provides peanut/tree nut-free meals in our cafeteria. The daily menu is viewable through a link on the district website with information on major allergens listed. The school district also discourages the use of food rewards in the classroom.

What other steps does Bird Rock take on campus for food-allergic students?

While there may be set accommodations in place for some of the more common allergies, we are committed to working with every family to keep our students safe. Many of the recent changes in our policies reflect district-wide trends toward healthier habits for our children.

CLASSROOM: If there is a student with a serious allergy in a class, all families in that class will receive a letter explaining that there is a food-allergic student in the class. This letter identifies the allergy but not the student name.

Bird Rock Elementary's implementation of the SDUSD Wellness Policy has introduced the elimination of all communal snacks and food rewards during school hours. Every classroom will be food-free unless a teacher has obtained permission to provide food. If teachers would like to include food for a project or for consumption, they can request an exception from the school administration and Wellness Committee, based on the particular food and the educational value of its use. If teachers receive approval to have food in the classroom, they are asked to communicate with families prior to use.

Please note that while families are encouraged to celebrate birthdays and other events with non-food items, the above policies do not prevent families from distributing food treats after school outside the classroom. Lists of other ways to celebrate birthdays, holidays, multi-cultural and other events are available from the school District's Wellness Committee.

When substitute teachers are in your child's classroom, they will also have your child's allergy information in the "sub binder", however it might be best to ensure that the form included by your teacher includes your child's picture for easier identification.

LUNCH/SNACK: A peanut/tree nut-free table is designated for snack and lunch locations. However, if your child has other allergies, exposure to those other allergens will not be limited as this table. These seating locations are optional for students and families that wish to take part. Any student may sit at the nut-allergy table, however student food brought to the table must be inspected prior to joining the table. Nut-allergic students are not required to sit at the nut-free table, so this should be a conversation that you have with your child. Explain how the table works and make sure your child knows that friends are welcome. Also know that this may or may not be the best fit for your child. It is an optional resource that we provide to accommodate all preferences. Please note that staff do their best to assess food brought to the table but cannot guarantee that visually inspected foods are free from cross-contamination. Please encourage your child to never eat another student's food and to always wash their hands before and after eating. The nut-allergy tables are cleaned prior to meals/snacks. Optimally, schools should ban any sharing of food at all meal and snack tables, in buses, and all school events. This message should be in place and reinforced, regardless of whether or not there is a known food-allergic student.

CAMPUS-WIDE: Nutrition services provided through our school cafeteria currently are nut-free. Please review menus online for allergen information regarding other allergens. In addition, our teaching and administrative staff is trained annually by our health staff to address food allergy reactions.

FOUNDATION EVENTS: Many events that take place on school grounds are actually run by the Bird Rock Foundation. Some of these include Pizza Wednesdays, Donuts with Dad, and several other events throughout the year. These are not events run by the school staff or administration. Therefore, any questions about food ingredients and vendors can be directed to the Foundation leadership.

What forms are required for children with food allergies?

Students with food allergies first come to our attention through allergy information provided by parents on the gold form titled **Health Information Exchange Consent** which is included in BRE's registration packet. Any student with the potential for a serious reaction should have a **School Anaphylaxis Action Plan** completed by the parent and prescribing physician, and submit the form with their prescribed Epinephrine autoinjector. Your child's potential to have a "serious allergic reaction" should be determined by your pediatrician and/or pediatric allergist. The Anaphylaxis Action Plan explains the steps in addressing a reaction at school. It will accompany your child's epinephrine so that it is easily accessible to the adults caring for your child in an emergency. While you may prefer to use a different action plan obtained from online sources or specific to your doctor's office, and while these will be accepted by the district, the district's own forms are preferred by our district health staff so they can more quickly access information and teach non-health staff at school in a standardized way. Please complete these district forms for our school staff. It is also best to include a picture of your child.

There is an additional optional plan/form called an Individualized Student Health Plan (ISHP). This form is typically used for medical conditions that do not already have a standardized action plan used by the district. These forms are used in any range of medical conditions that require a clear written plan for staff and families. For food-allergic students, the difference between this form and the regular Anaphylaxis Action Plan is that the ISHP designates specific staff members who have agreed to be contacted to administer the epinephrine auto-injector for your student. Since these staff members are not always in close proximity to your child, using this form does not prevent other staff from helping your child in an emergency. Any trained staff can assist if an allergic reaction occurs. You are also able to designate other items that may not fit into a typical anaphylaxis plan. Please contact the school nursing staff if you would like more information regarding this type of plan.

Other safeguards

Handwashing: Some parents want all classmates and playground colleagues to wash their hands after each meal and snack, so that their child is not inadvertently contaminated by another child during play. While theoretically this sounds logical, it poses more problems than it solves. Hand gels do not remove allergens, so they are not effective. The capacity of sinks in a school are limited, given the number of children who finish eating at any one point in time. Children crowd together so that the unwashed touch and “high-five” the washed – negating the intention of hand washing. In addition, children’s T-shirts, pants and other clothing, contain food allergens which cannot be readily washed. It has been found to be more effective to teach the allergic student to repeatedly clean or wipe their hands so that when they rub their eyes or touch their mouths, the contaminated food has been recently washed off. For very young children who cannot learn to do this regularly, school staff can be assigned to reminding them and directing them accordingly.

Identification: Parents should be encouraged to provide medical alert bracelets to their child if there is a severe food allergy. This assists even those members of a school community or community outside of school, when there are sudden symptoms. Parents in a child’s carpool should be notified. Providing photos of your child to attach to an Allergy Action plan can be helpful, especially for substitute teachers and nursing/health staff. The location(s) of the Epinephrine pens should be identified on the allergy action plans and other documents, so that they can be easily retrieved. Identify where these will be on field trips, bus rides, etc. And parents should identify the dates when the Epinephrine pens expire, so that they can remember to bring in fresh doses. Parents, the student’s prescribing doctor, and school nurse need to identify when a student is responsible enough to self-carry an additional Epinephrine pen (e.g., in a fanny pack or backpack).

What happens in the case of an emergency in the classroom?

Your child's teacher will call the office for help and appropriate staff members will access your child's medication and come to help the teacher. If an emergency occurs in the common areas, multiple staff members will be available to assist. You will be notified once the student's condition has been addressed safely.

Is food brought into the classroom by other parents or staff?

As noted previously, there will be no communal snacks or food rewards in the classroom. The only food consumed/used in the classroom will be that brought in by your teacher, after approval by administration. This will be at your teacher's discretion and communicated to students and families in advance; please communicate with your teacher regarding this issue. **It would be best to set a meeting with your child's teacher at the beginning of the year to discuss any events where your child may have contact with food in the classroom.** If food is coming into your classroom in other ways than those described above, please let the administration know so we can attend to any issues in a timely manner.

Who do I address with concerns regarding my child and their safety?

Be your child's best advocate. Most questions can be answered by our health staff (school nurse or health tech) or by our principal. If not, they will provide resources to help find the best answer. In many cases, involving your child's classroom teacher as well may be beneficial. We welcome any feedback and would like to work together on this important issue.

(Updated April 2018)