

School Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Management for the Pediatrician—Extending the Medical Home with Critical Collaborations



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KEYWORDS

- Food allergy • Primary care pediatrician • Anaphylaxis • Emergency response
- School health

KEY POINTS

- Community pediatricians participate in critical collaborations within schools that support families and children with food allergy and other potentially life-threatening allergies.
- Community pediatricians can provide leadership and guidance to both families and schools to safeguard children and adolescents with food allergy and other potentially life-threatening allergies, thereby extending the medical home goals into the school setting.

INTRODUCTION

Primary care pediatricians are the managers and facilitators of the patient-centered medical home and serve as the glue in a series of critical collaborations within schools that support the family and child with food allergy and other potentially life-threatening allergies. When primary care pediatricians include the school health professional team into a child's overall medical plan for managing life-threatening food allergies and anaphylaxis, they can further the goals of the medical home. They can provide leadership and guidance to extend the medical home goals into the school setting, by

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educating the family to partner with their schools and encouraging the school to provide reasonable and effective accommodations, as per state or federal guidelines. In fact, the most effective management of life-threatening food allergies and anaphylaxis occurs when the medical home, the family home, and the educational home work together as a team for the benefit of the child or adolescent, ultimately affording the student the least restrictive environment with the greatest chance for safety and maximal opportunity to learn and thrive.

Families of children with food allergies are reliant on many individuals when it comes to the school community. The pediatrician and the pediatric allergist play a critical role in clearly defining the food allergy management strategies necessary for the child. They work with parents and schools to ensure that these important strategies are applied to the specific student while taking school resources and policies into account and collaborating with the school team. Pediatricians can coordinate and foster mutually beneficial relationships, a spirit of trust, and positive interactions among all stakeholders, especially the family. The school nurse, school physician, and others on the school health team are key members of the multidisciplinary school teams that include nutrition services, school administration, teachers, counselors, transportation directors, special subject areas, physical education teachers, and all others who interact with students.

The purpose of this article is two fold. The first is to guide community pediatricians by strengthening their understanding of essential principles and components in effective food allergy management in the school setting and to direct readers to additional resources to support this goal.¹⁻³ The second is to empower pediatricians to be the stewards in collaborations that bridge the medical, family, and educational homes for the sake of children with food allergies and other potential life threatening allergies.

FOOD ALLERGY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES: THE PILLARS OF PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

Effective food allergy management is necessary at all times and in all situations. The pillars of food allergy management are prevention and emergency preparedness. Very small amounts of food allergen can cause anaphylaxis (severe, life-threatening, allergic reaction). To prevent accidental exposure, those responsible for students must effectively read labels, prevent ingestion of hidden ingredients, prevent cross-contact, use efficient cleaning strategies, and communicate clearly. It is equally necessary to be prepared for an allergic emergency. Adults who are responsible for students must be able to recognize an allergic reaction and have epinephrine (first-line treatment of choice for anaphylaxis) available. They must also know when and how to use it and know to contact emergency services immediately. These strategies are always necessary, and the school setting is no exception. Implementing solid food allergy management is challenging and takes knowledgeable administration, school nurses, school staff, and school community.^{2,4}

Prevention

It is important for pediatricians to understand the different routes of exposure and the risks of these exposures and apply this understanding to the school setting. Pediatricians should be aware of challenges and solutions as they apply to preventing accidental exposures in the school setting. **Table 1** contains a list of potential routes of exposure, challenges to preventing these exposures, and solutions to these challenges.⁵ Pediatricians, as individuals and/or as American Academy of Pediatrics

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