



# Aaa-choo ... it's allergy season

Spring is just around the corner, and with that can come the sniffs, sneezes and wheezes of allergies. Regardless of the source, allergies can interfere with everything from playing on the playground, eating in the lunchroom, to learning in the classroom. While severe allergies demand our attention, even mild chronic allergies can cause problems.

Children who have difficulty with breathing can develop sleep problems, miss school, experience a delay in language development, and, in some cases, have their teeth and facial bone growth affected. Even if the results are not drastic, a child with allergies can feel just plain awful.

Allergies are the sign of a confused immune system. The body mistakes substances, such as food or pollen, as being harmful, and it reacts by producing histamines, which cause the familiar symptoms. Allergies are typically inherited but can be aggravated by stress.

Seeking medical treatment for allergies is a good idea, as doctors can help identify what is causing the allergy, give treatment advice, determine the severity, and educate both parents and child. In many cases, a visit with an allergy specialist is warranted to determine a complete list of allergies and a specific plan for treatment.

**Whether or not your child has allergies or has a risk of a severe reaction, please remember that the school desires to provide a safe environment for every child.**

Treatment typically involves avoiding the trigger whenever possible. Frequently, more than one allergy is involved, and an initial allergy can lead to related allergies. Eyes swelling shut after playing with



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a guinea pig can mean an allergy to mold hiding in the bedding as well as an allergy to the animal. In this instance, simply avoiding the animal may not be enough to alleviate the symptoms. Further treatment can involve medications that are designed to desensitize your child to the allergen. For more severe reactions, other emergency medications, a treatment plan, and perhaps a medical identification tag may be in order. Doctors have many tools for keeping allergy victims safe.

It is possible to be allergic to just about anything, but the following categories represent the most common allergies:

### Seasonal

Allergies to dust, pollen, or mold spores wafting through the air can cause symptoms hard to differentiate from a cold. Colds tend to follow a seven-to-10 day pattern, whereas allergies can be worse on windy days or after a rain.

### Pet

Discovering that your child is allergic to the family pet or

even the classroom pet can be difficult. Allergies are usually triggered by pet dander or saliva rather than animal hair. While avoiding contact with the trigger is best, see your child's doctor for alternatives when this is not a practical option.

## Food

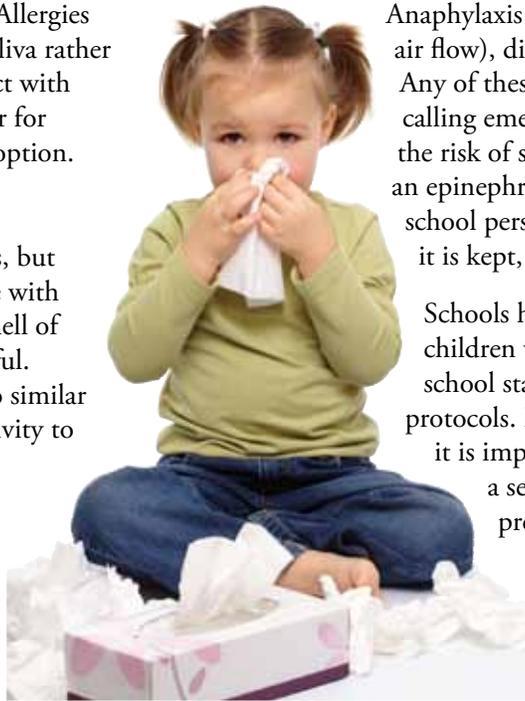
Some food allergies cause mild reactions, but others are potentially fatal. Some people with peanut allergies can react to even the smell of peanuts, so schools have to be very careful. Also, a child can have related allergies to similar foods. A peanut allergy can mean sensitivity to tree nuts also.

## Medical

Allergies to drugs or latex are a big concern in medical centers. Children who have had several surgeries are susceptible to latex allergies, and many people are allergic to antibiotics, pain medications, or anesthesia. Be vocal to health care providers regarding your child's allergies; don't wait for them to ask.

Most symptoms of allergies—stuffy or runny nose, itchy hives, rashes, and mild swelling—are simply annoying. However, two symptoms are potentially fatal: asthma and anaphylaxis. A child with asthma is at risk of a serious attack, even if the asthma is mild. These children need, at minimum, a yearly visit with the doctor to evaluate symptoms and medications. Even if your child can self-medicate, his teacher and school should be aware of his condition. It is highly recommended that your child use a peak flow meter and an inhaler spacer to monitor her medication needs.

Anaphylactic shock is the most severe allergic reaction. It is most likely to happen with some food allergies or insect stings but can also happen with medication or latex allergies.



Anaphylaxis causes severe swelling (often cutting off air flow), dizziness and eventually unconsciousness. Any of these symptoms should be handled by calling emergency services. Often, children with the risk of such a reaction are encouraged to carry an epinephrine kit. You will want to make sure that school personnel are aware of this kit, know where it is kept, and how and when to use it.

Schools have come a long way in dealing with children with allergies. Many states require school staff to be trained in asthma/allergy protocols. Even with these precautions in place, it is important for the parent of a child with a severe allergy to remind teachers about procedures.

Keep good records of doctor recommendations, and put a copy in your child's backpack to give to substitute teachers. The better you communicate, the better all will be

prepared to deal with an emergency.

Whether or not your child has allergies or has a risk of a severe reaction, please remember that the school desires to provide a safe environment for every child. Refrain from complaining if the school notifies you that a classroom pet must find a new home, that latex balloons are not allowed or that food should be checked for peanut products. This may present some extra work for you, but your participation can mean a safe learning environment for another child. It is part of how we show God's love for each other.

## For further study:

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology has an allergy relief test you can use: [www.acaai.org/allergist/tools/relief\\_test/Pages/asthma\\_allergy\\_relief\\_test.aspx](http://www.acaai.org/allergist/tools/relief_test/Pages/asthma_allergy_relief_test.aspx)

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