

Management of Food Allergies at Holy Cross

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As food allergies become more common in the pediatric population, it is imperative that schools have a comprehensive plan in place that is straightforward and can be easily followed by students, parents and faculty. Such a plan needs to focus on allergy education, allergen avoidance and treatment of allergic reactions and anaphylaxis.

Holy Cross is a unique environment in that our building houses children from age four to adolescence. In addition, the building is used for many school wide, after school and church activities involving food consumption. This presents challenges to a uniform allergy policy for the building. A ban on certain food products, even if taken very seriously by the school community, is near to impossible to enforce on all groups that use the building. It may lead to a false sense of security that allergens are not on the premises.

Most expert organizations (American Academy of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control, FARE- Food Allergy Research and Education) tend to focus on parent, student and faculty education involving allergy awareness and allergen avoidance rather than food bans. That being said, they do acknowledge that in the early childhood environment, and in the case of students with severe inhalational allergies this may not be possible. In these situations classroom bans may be appropriate.

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention published a document entitled Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. This document was authored in conjunction with the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Management Act signed into law in 2011 to help create guidelines for schools to manage food allergies in their particular environments. These guidelines call for each school to have a Food Allergy Management Prevention Plan (FAMPP). The five principles of this plan include:

1. Ensure the daily management of food allergies in individual children.
2. Prepare for food allergy emergencies
3. Provide professional development on food allergies for staff members
4. Educate children and family members about food allergies
5. Create and maintain a healthy and safe educational environment.

At Holy Cross, we have made several efforts over the past couple of years to address the above principles. The faculty has been educated about the signs and symptoms of allergic reactions/anaphylaxis by a board certified pediatrician and have all practiced epi-pen administration using an attenuated injector. Every child's allergy plan is printed out on flip cards that are placed in each classroom, each office and the cafeteria. The plans clearly indicate the location of each child's epi-pen and there is an adult epi-pen in the office at all times.

The remaining hurdle is formulating an official allergy policy that is succinct, straightforward, and easily enforceable while striving to protect and educate our students with food allergies.