

Health Homework: Preventing Severe Allergic Reactions

(NAPSA)—Back to school for kids means getting new clothes, supplies, and looking forward to meeting new teachers and classmates. Yet the start of the school year can be stressful for parents of the millions of children who have life-threatening allergies and for parents who don't understand why these kids need special treatment. For these children, exposure to certain food, insect venom, latex or medicine can trigger a potentially fatal allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis.

Two million school-aged children have food allergies, and approximately one in five of them will experience a reaction at school. In managing back-to-school hazards, educating everyone about the reason for a peanut-free lunch room or other preventive measures is just as important as careful preparation for a possible emergency.

Blair Ryan, a registered nurse in Florida and mother of an elementary school-aged child with severe peanut allergies, knows first hand the anxiety parents experience. "Parents have more control over school health policies than they think, even when your child has a potentially life-threatening allergic condition," says Ryan.

Parents: Be Prepared

Ryan encourages parents to work in collaboration with school officials to develop an action plan for an emergency.

- **Be Proactive:** Be a team player, talk with teachers, coaches and staff about your child's allergy. Explain potential triggers and how to identify and treat a true allergic reaction. Insist that your child be allowed to carry an EpiPen® epinephrine auto-injector with them at all times (and that it not be locked up in the school clinic).

- **Seek Help:** Groups like the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (www.foodallergy.org) can provide guidance on how to establish a safer environment. FAAN has created a "School Allergy Program Kit" that is available for schools by request. You can reduce

the risk of a reaction at school by creating peanut-free classrooms and cafeterias.

- **Know the Rules:** Currently, there are no uniform standards across the country allowing children with severe allergies to carry their life-saving epinephrine auto-injectors with them during the school day. Not all states have them in their first aid kits at school. And, in many schools, only the school nurse or aide is trained to respond to an anaphylactic emergency. Understand your child's school policy for emergency medications in schools. Take an active roll in changing policies and standing up for your child's safety.

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- **Plan Ahead:** Know your child's routine at school. Pack lunches; check ingredients being used in art class and at snack time. Make special arrangements and have a plan any place your child could have an allergic reaction. Before the new school year starts, request a staff training session on anaphylaxis and how to use an epinephrine auto-injector. Talk to your doctor if you think you or your child is at risk for a severe allergic reaction. An injection of epinephrine can help stop the symptoms and buy time for a patient to reach the emergency room. Side effects of epinephrine may include fast or irregular heartbeat, nausea and difficulty breathing.

Homework Assignment: Because Every Second Counts. Back-to-school is the perfect time for parents to safeguard their children's health. With proper education, communication and planning, parents, students and school staff can approach the new school year knowing they are prepared.

For further information, visit www.epipen.com or call 1-877-4-EPIPEN.