



Food Allergies—A Common Problem

Food allergies are more common than you think. The reactions from food allergies may be as simple as a rash, or in some instances, life threatening.

Foods that are most likely to cause allergic reactions are peanuts, tree nuts, dairy products, eggs, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. Although most food allergies produce symptoms that are uncomfortable, persons with allergies to the previously listed foods can suffer more serious consequences.

Successful management of severe food allergies can mean the difference between life and death. Do you have a policy to reduce the likelihood of severe allergic reactions of persons with known food allergies while at school?

If you have a child in a daycare or preschool setting, or have children attending a church ministry function, written protocols for the food sensitive people should be developed. Protocols should be designed to avoid exposure to foods to which the person is allergic. The church should work closely with parents to implement reasonable protocols submitted by parents and the treating physician. Information pertaining to a person's allergies should be shared with staff and volunteers who have contact with the person, but otherwise will be kept as confidential as possible.

Training can prevent food-sensitive students from being exposed to allergens. The group training session should include:

- The child's teacher, special area teachers/volunteers
- Bus drivers
- Cafeteria workers or any other persons responsible for the student
- The parents

Training should include:

- An overview of the food allergy
- The child's history of reactions to the food
- An emergency plan

The emergency plan should include information from the child's physician as to how to handle the allergy. Also included in your plan should be the use of the epinephrine pen and CPR, emergency phone numbers, location of emergency medications, how-to's for identifying foods that may contain the allergy-related food and practice of the emergency response plan. This training will help everyone recognize symptoms of an allergic reaction and how to respond if necessary. The church should also keep epinephrine on-site for treatment of anaphylactic response, if the child's physician recommends it.

A food allergy occurs when a person's immune system mistakenly believes certain foods are harmful. In an effort to protect the body, the immune system makes antibodies to those specific foods. These antibodies sit on the surface of allergy cells found within the body. When the antibodies detect the food, they alert the allergy cell to release chemicals and histamines, resulting in the symptoms of an allergic reaction. Physical symptoms will occur just after eating or contact with the food and may include:

- Hives/itching, especially around the mouth
- Itching
- Change of color of the skin
- Irritated eyes
- Runny nose
- Tightening of the throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizziness and/or fainting
- Swelled tongue
- Flushed face
- Difficulty breathing
- Cramping and nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of consciousness



Ministry Protection Memo

"MPM" is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety. Send your comments and interests to AME Zion's Director of Ministry Protection.

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"You should identify the individuals who will respond to the emergency and discuss in advance, each person's role. Careful planning and communication between the children, parents, staff and volunteers will provide a safe environment for those with food allergies."

Anaphylaxis is also described as anaphylactic shock. The symptoms of anaphylactic shock may involve swelling of the gastrointestinal tract, the skin, the respiratory tract and the cardiovascular system. These symptoms often occur in combination and develop very rapidly. Remember, if the symptoms do occur, you should seek professional medical attention immediately!

Parents of students with allergies should submit protocols designed to avoid exposure to certain foods. Parents of students should provide emergency medications and a written medical treatment protocol for their student, addressing allergy-related events. The information should be maintained by the church and the medication should be kept in an area where the student resides. The reasoning behind this is that in the event of an emergency, the medication should be readily available as food-allergy reactions come on quickly and must be treated immediately.

A letter should also be sent home to the parents in the child's classroom informing them of the presence of a food sensitive child. The letter should preserve the anonymity of the student.

Parents must be responsible for educating their child about managing the allergy at school or an event, including the identification for safe foods. This can be done by reviewing the weekly menu together, showing a child what they can and cannot eat and how to read labels for hidden ingredients or alternate names. If a parent is unsure about foods served in the classroom, parents should work with the staff and volunteers about the menu and if concern is still generated, the parent should provide meals or treats for their child. It is also suggested that a parent or guardian of a child with a food allergy provide the teacher with a supply of safe snacks in the event the child is participating in a function to avoid accidental exposure.

While a church may take every precaution to help the food-sensitive students avoid exposure to the related foods, it cannot be guaranteed. Many schools may adopt a food policy that will exclude specific foods or develop snack schedules listing the specific-included foods. If the school does not exclude a specific food, they may take additional precautions to have the allergy-sensitive students eat at a separate table, wipe down surfaces with disinfectant before and after eating, etc.

You should identify the individuals who will respond to the emergency and discuss in advance, each person's role. Careful planning and communication between the children, parents, staff and volunteers will provide a safe environment for those with food allergies. Hopefully, you will never have to use such an emergency plan. However, development of proactive management plans may save a life.



As noted, some churches may adopt an allergen-specific program, which excludes particular foods. Churches may also adopt a food safety program. If your church would like to ensure all foods acceptable, you may find it necessary to adapt existing situations for food-sensitive children.

Upon registration, a parent should notify the church of the specific medical needs of their child. If a food allergy is noted, there should be a signed waiver from the parent, as well as information from the treating physician as to the food allergy and the specifics of treatment should the child encounter a food they are allergic to within the church environment.

An example of an acceptance letter and waiver are attached for your review and use.

The Ministry Protection Memo (MPM) series is offered as an educational tool in support of AME Zion property and casualty insurance program to help you develop loss control procedures to suit your specific needs. With these publications, AME Zion does not seek to establish a particular standard of care or to promote legal advice. We encourage church leaders to consult with competent attorneys with regard to their specific loss control need. AME Zion encourages reproduction and distribution of this MPM within the AME Zion denomination.

Sample Letter

Dear Mr. / Mrs. _____:

Thank you for enrolling your child in CHURCH NAME HERE and alerting us to your child's food allergy. In response to your requests regarding your child's limitations and requirements, we have evaluated our ability to comply and have concluded the following:

- Your child is welcome to enroll in our church program.
- You are welcome to send a letter to all participants explaining your child's situation and requesting their compliance with your child's dietary restrictions.
- You may send appropriate snacks for your child to consume as a substitute for other treats that participants bring to the school.
- We will need a letter from your child's doctor detailing your child's condition and outlining the restrictions to their involvement in public activities, as well as the necessary medical treatment of the food allergy.
- You will need to supply prescriptions or medical supplies for your child, which will be maintained by staff or volunteers with direct contact to your child.
- While we recognize the seriousness of your child's condition, it is also important that you recognize and understand the limitations of our ability to guarantee absolute compliance in all situations.

CHURCH NAME HERE can in no way guarantee the ingredients of foods prepared by participants and will therefore only serve your child, snacks that have been supplied by you.

While we will do what we can to keep other children from sharing their snacks with your child, it must be understood that considering the age group we work with, we cannot guarantee that other children will not offer to share their snacks with your child and that your child will not willingly accept a snack offered by another child.

CHURCH NAME HERE can in no way guarantee that students have not consumed foods containing FOOD ALLERGY HERE at home, nor can we control exposure from the parking lot to the classroom.

There are many functions that occur in CHURCH NAME HERE which include foods brought in from participants, and CHURCH NAME HERE cannot guarantee that foods containing FOOD ALLERGY HERE will not be present when your child is in the building.

We appreciate your interest in our program and we look forward to the opportunity to work with you and your child.

Release of Liability Form

CHURCH NAME HERE

Release of Liability

Participant's Name: _____

Days Attending: _____

Please Read Carefully—This is a Release of Liability

Although precautions are taken to provide proper organization, instruction, and equipment for your child's participation in our programs, there can be no guarantee of absolute safety against injury and unforeseeable accident or incident. There are elements of risk in any program involving physical activity, outdoor play areas and field trips. I, on behalf of myself, my child, and any other parent of the child understand that my child may be involved in physical activities conducted both inside the church building and outside in the play area.

In addition children with allergies, including but not limited to food, insect, or plant allergies, may be exposed to the allergen while participating in preschool activities. Although parents and teachers can take precautions to minimize exposure to and limit the ingredients in foods consumed by the individuals, there can be no guarantee of absolute safety against accidental exposure to the allergen. I, on behalf of myself, my child and any other parent of the child understand that my child may be exposed to the allergen that my child is allergic to while participating in preschool activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RISKS:

I recognize that there is inherent danger in any activity which involves physical activity; that natural hazards do exist; that although the program may not be strenuous, injuries or medical complications may occur; that certain foreseeable and unforeseeable events unique to each individual activity can contribute to the unpredictability of the activity; that balance and physical coordination may affect the occurrence of accidents or falls; and that I should ask about other potential hazards and recommended precautions and procedures.

I recognize that children with allergies including but not limited to food, insect, or plant allergies may be exposed to the allergen while participating in preschool activities. I understand that although parents of other participants can be alerted to the allergy and be requested to limit consumption of the indicated allergen, we cannot guarantee that foods consumed outside the environment will be allergen-free. In addition, I understand that if outside food is brought in for special snacks by participants in the program, the church cannot guarantee that the ingredients will be completely free of the allergen.

EXPRESS ASSUMPTION OF RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY:

In recognition of the inherent risks of the activities which my child will be engaged in, I confirm that my child is physically and mentally capable of participation in activities. I understand that there is no way to control the consumption by other participants of ingredients that my child may be allergic to, and that my child may be in the same room as children who have consumed the allergen. I understand that it is my responsibility to explain limitations to my child regarding diet restrictions due to allergies or other conditions, and I agree to provide any necessary food substitutions. I understand that my child will be encouraged, but not forced to participate in activities and I assume full responsibility for accidental exposure, personal injuries, and accidents or illnesses, including death. I also assume responsibility for damage to or loss of personal property as the result of any accident that may occur.

AUTHORIZATION:

I hereby authorize any medical treatment deemed necessary in the event of any injury to my child while participating in activities in the event that I cannot be contacted. I will have appropriate insurance or, in its absence, I agree to pay all costs of rescue and/or medical services as may be incurred on behalf of my child.

RELEASE:

In consideration of services or property provided, I, for myself, for my child and for any other parent of the child, do hereby release **CHURCH NAME HERE**, its principals, trustees, directors, officers, agents, employees and volunteers, and each and every land owner, municipal and/or governmental agency upon whose property an activity is conducted, from all liability with respect to my child and I waive any claim for damage arising from any cause whatsoever, except for any claims which are the result of gross negligence of the party or parties released herein.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____