



January Healthy Hints from the School Nurse

Welcome 2019! I hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful winter break.

As we start a new year, I would like to focus on increasing awareness of food allergies. Seven percent of our BPS students live with severe allergies, making it an important health topic for all staff, students and their families.

According to FARE (Food Allergy Research and Education), 15 million Americans live with food allergies; 5.9 million of them are children. That means about 1 in 13 children live with severe allergies. The CDC reports that the prevalence of food allergies has risen by 50 percent between 1997 and 2011 and the number of people with tree nut and peanut allergies has tripled in that time. In 1999, my first year as school nurse at Brookside, there was one student with severe food allergies. Today, I have EpiPen orders for 24 students. The most common allergens include peanuts, tree nuts, milk, egg, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish and latex. Sesame is quickly becoming a common allergen as well.

Allergies are caused by a body's over reactive immune response. A person has contact with many foods or substances that are harmless. However, in a person with severe allergies, their body mistakenly recognizes these as dangerous and mounts an attack. A mild allergic reaction causes a release of histamine which leads to the itchiness, runny nose, red eyes and rashes. However, in a severe allergic reaction, known as anaphylaxis, chemicals are released that lead to a cascade of serious effects on every body system. Anaphylaxis is a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction which can have a sudden onset appearing immediately or two hours later after contact with the offending food or substance. Anaphylaxis can lead to widespread hives, swelling of the lips, mouth and throat, blocked airways, difficulty breathing and swallowing, vomiting, a severe drop in blood pressure and even death. This reaction can be caused by ingesting and, sometimes, touching, so it needs to be taken seriously.

At Brookside Place School, we work to give all students a safe learning environment. Since even touching an area where there have been nuts can cause a reaction in affected students, classes that include these students are asked to avoid sending in food that contain or may contain nuts or peanuts for snack or for any of the four designated classroom celebrations. We offer a peanut/tree nut free table in the lunchroom so students may bring whatever they enjoy for lunch time.

This month at Brookside, we will increase awareness of food allergies and what it is like to live with the possibility of a severe allergic reaction. There will be various posters and presentations by students with allergies displayed around the school.

Here are a few thoughts from Brooksidiers about what it is like to live with severe allergies. Consider it “food” for thought:

“It’s hard to eat in restaurants. Even at Dunkin Donuts, you are always taking a risk.”

“It’s really hard because you see people eating things you want, but you have to say no when it is offered to you.”

“Having allergies doesn’t feel different except you are restricted and always have to be on alert when you eat out of your house.”

Extra reminders:

- Please call the absence line if your child will be absent and give a reason for absence - 908-709-6246.
- If your child has a fever or is vomiting, please keep him or her home for 24 hours, fever or symptom free without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Please clear your voicemail and update contact information as needed.
- Please be sure your child is dressed appropriately as time outdoors is the preferred option for recess.

Here’s to a happy, healthy 2019!

~ Paula O’Hara, Brookside Place School Nurse