Food allergies are a growing food safety and public health concern that affects an estimated 8% of children. A food allergy is a specific and reproducible immune response that occurs after exposure to certain foods. According to the CDC, eight foods/food groups account for most of the serious allergic reactions in the United States: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts, and tree nuts. Allergic reactions to foods can vary unpredictably, from mild to severe and potentially life threatening, such as anaphylaxis. Always take reports of food allergies seriously.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction may include swollen lips, tongue, or eyes; itching, particularly the mouth or ears; a rash or hives; nausea or vomiting; diarrhea; nasal congestion or a runny nose; hoarseness or trouble swallowing; coughing, wheezing or difficulty breathing; dizziness; fainting; loss of consciousness; and/or mood changes or confusion. If untreated, symptoms may progress and can become life threatening.

It is estimated that in a typical classroom, at least one student is likely to be affected by a food allergy and this number is on the rise. Students with food allergies can stay safe at school, but it takes organization, preparation, and education. Communication is the key!

If your child has a food allergy, please be sure to notify the school nurse and teacher. Include information about the symptoms he/she has experienced in the past. Be sure to have your doctor sign the orders for an Emergency Action Plan on how to treat any suspected exposure incidents and provide any emergency medications (i.e. epinephrine, Benadryl™) your child may need. Allergic reactions can be unpredictable; here are some suggestions to help plan ahead:

✓ Frequently review your child’s allergies with him/her, so that he/she knows what the allergens are, which foods must be avoided, and what foods are considered okay to eat.

✓ Remind your child not to ever accept food from any other person and never to eat something if he/she does not know it is safe.

✓ Handwashing with soap and water before and after eating is a must.

✓ Review with your child the signs of an allergic reaction to watch for and always make sure your child knows whom to tell if he/she is not feeling well.

✓ Check in regularly with the school to see how things are going and provide any updates.

✓ Be sure the school has all of your contact information and knows how to reach you at any time in case there are questions, concerns, or an emergency.

✓ Provide safe snack foods for your child. Be sure to plan for parties or events where there may be foods that could pose a problem.

✓ As children get older, teach them to read labels and recognize ingredients that may cause an allergic reaction.

**Your child’s health & safety are our #1 priority. Please contact your school nurse if you have any questions.**

*Office of Health Services*