

For Lifelong Health

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Toward Preventing Food-Allergy Incidents in School Lunches

Key Points for Managing Food Allergies at School with Safety as the Highest Priority

For Parents and Guardians

In 2012, a student died following suspected anaphylactic shock caused by a school lunch. In response, and to prevent another such tragedy, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published the Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in School Lunches (*1; hereafter, the Guidelines) in March 2015. The Guidelines are based on the Guidelines for Managing Allergic Diseases at School issued by the Japanese Society of School Health and set out six Fundamental Principles (*2).

This newsletter focuses on the two most important Fundamental Principles: putting safety first, and ensuring, as an organization, that food-allergy management is based on physicians' diagnoses. The relevant content of the Guidelines has been summarized in an accessible format for parents and guardians.

Checking school lunches for students with food allergies

Food-allergy accommodation meal plan

School lunch menu

"So that every student can enjoy school lunch safely and happily."

Photo courtesy of Shibafuji Elementary School, Kawaguchi City.

Key Points for Managing Food Allergies

Putting Safety First to Prevent Accidents

To provide school lunch to students with food allergies, schools must put safety first. Parents and guardians are therefore required to submit a School Life Management and Guidance Form (for Allergic Diseases), completed on the basis of a physician's diagnosis, every year. In the school lunch kitchen, apply a binary “serve or do not serve” decision to each relevant item: either provide the affected student with that item after the causative food has been completely removed, or do not provide that item to the student.

Actions Required to Put Safety First

Required Documentation

Submit the School Life Management and Guidance Form every year

To give top priority to school lunch safety, the form must be submitted before enrollment, when a student transfers to the school, and each year when the student advances to the next grade, for the following reasons:

1. Accurate information can be understood and shared by everyone involved, enabling an appropriate response.
2. An annual evaluation by a physician helps the school understand the student's food-allergy symptoms accurately. As the student's condition is reassessed, the range of foods that can be eaten safely may increase, helping to improve nutritional balance and support healthy growth.

*3 See page 4 for information on reliable medical facilities.

Individual Meeting

Before food-allergy accommodations begin, an individual meeting is held with the parent or guardian in the presence of the principal, school administrators, the school nurse (Yogo teacher), the nutrition teacher, and staff responsible for implementation. The information obtained is compiled, and the kitchen's response is determined on the basis of the interview record and an individual action plan prepared for the school's circumstances.

School Lunch Provision

Why the basic approach is a binary choice: complete elimination or no provision

To provide school lunch safely to students with food allergies, make a binary decision for each relevant item: either provide the affected student with the dish after the causative food has been completely removed, or do not provide that dish to the student.

1. Highly detailed, multi-level accommodations can actually increase the risk of errors and accidents. Schools therefore avoid complex or excessive accommodations and limit the number of students and food items requiring separate handling. (See the examples below.)
2. Compared with the extensive individualized support sometimes provided at nursery schools and kindergartens, this approach may appear to be a step backward. In fact, however, it raises the level of safety in order to prevent accidents.

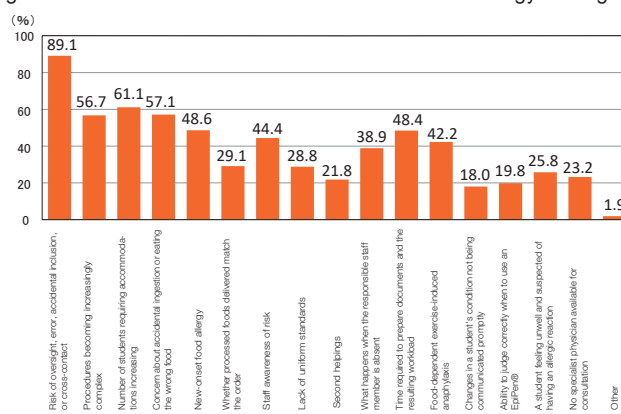
Examples of Errors Caused by Complex Kitchen Procedures

1. Detailed and complicated accommodations were made in response to a parent's request. The procedures became cumbersome and led to a variety of errors.
2. Several different elimination patterns were used for the same dish. Kitchen staff became confused and served the wrong substitute meal.
3. Staff concentrated on removing one allergen and forgot another required elimination.
4. There were so many accommodation requirements that staff overlooked the essential task of preparing or serving the meal.

Data 1: School Life Management and Guidance Form (for Allergic Diseases)

Source: Guidelines for Managing Allergic Diseases at School, Japanese Society of School Health

Figure 1: What concerns do staff have about food-allergy management?



Source: Report on the Food Allergy Survey, Japanese Association for Dietetic Research and Education.

at School: For Parents and Guardians

Schools and Parents/Guardians Working Together

To prevent the most serious accidents, it is essential for the school and parents or guardians to work together and systematically implement food-allergy management on the basis of the physician-completed School Life Management and Guidance Form.

Process for Systematically Implementing Food-Allergy Management Through School-Family Collaboration

Sharing Accurate Information

During the meeting with school administrators and school lunch personnel, the parent or guardian submits the School Life Management and Guidance Form completed on the basis of a physician's diagnosis. The school and family should continually verify and share accurate information about the student's food allergy.

Support in and Outside the Classroom

In preparation for emergencies, the school provides appropriate guidance to all staff and students so that everyone has a shared understanding.

1. In addition to homeroom teachers, school nurses, nutrition teachers, and kitchen staff, all other staff members - including those who are not directly involved in school lunch - must continually share accurate information, understand food allergies, and know how to respond.
2. All students should be taught regularly that food allergy is not simply a matter of likes and dislikes, and that protecting the lives of classmates with food allergies is important.
3. Students with food allergies should also be taught, in a developmentally appropriate way, to make decisions that help them avoid accidents themselves.

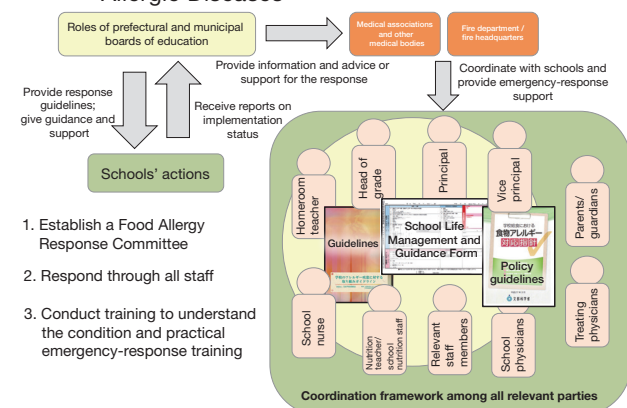
Organizational Structure

All staff must understand food allergy correctly and share information. Led by the principal, the school should act as a coordinated organization under a clearly defined policy and be prepared for emergencies.

1. The school establishes a Food Allergy Response Committee composed of relevant personnel. On the basis of the defined policy and the school's circumstances, the committee determines an appropriate school policy and specific measures, prepares individual action plans, and establishes systems for coordination with parents and guardians, medical institutions, and fire and emergency services.
2. Because food allergies can first develop at school and reactions may occur outside lunchtime, regular food-allergy training - including simulations - should be provided for all staff.

This issue has summarized, for parents and guardians, two especially important elements of the Guidelines and the Fundamental Principles. From the standpoint of providing school lunch with safety as the highest priority, it is clear that highly detailed accommodations made out of concern for individual students require careful judgment. As schools and families are called upon to work together from the perspective of students with food allergies, we hope that the School Edition and the Parents and Guardians Edition will promote wider use of the Guidelines.

Data 2: Framework for Promoting the Management of Allergic Diseases



Source: Adapted with modifications from the Fundamental Ideas about How to Cope with Allergic Disease at School, MEXT and the Japanese Society of School Health

Photo 1: Individual food-allergy meeting with the principal, school nurse, nutrition teacher, and parent or guardian



Photo courtesy of Moriama Elementary School, Moriama City.

