

PAC Recommendations on Food Allergies, Intolerances and Preferences

The PAC Health and Safety Committee has developed the guidelines below out of input received from Health and Safety Representatives throughout NSC on how their individual co-op handles food concerns (what forms are filled out, how parents and teachers are notified of allergies, and how and who decides on what can and can't be served for snack).

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

1. Educate co-op members on the differences between food *allergies* (or *intolerances*) and food *preferences*
2. Ensure that all co-ops are aware of and following NSC policies regarding food allergies
3. Assist co-ops in handling issues related to food allergies, intolerances and preferences by drawing upon the collective experience of NSC co-ops

ALLERGIES vs. PREFERENCES

Food allergies or intolerances present a health risk to the child and as such, *all adults* in the co-op are responsible for preventing children's exposure to foods that may cause an allergic reaction.

Food preferences are foods that parents prefer their child avoid (e.g. sugar, honey, processed foods) for health or other reasons, but do not necessarily pose an immediate health risk to the child. *Unlike food allergies, co-ops are not required to make special accommodation for food preferences*, though some co-ops do work to accommodate parents' special requests. If a food is offered that a parent prefers their child not eat, it is the *parent's responsibility* to make sure their child does not eat the food.

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING FOOD ALLERGIES

Based on the recent research regarding food allergies, we no longer recommend that all NSC co-op be nut free facilities. When parents know their child to be allergic to any foods, the following steps should be taken:

1. Per NSC Risk Management policy, *Parents are required* to fill out the Medical Emergency Response Plan in the Risk Management Manual, **have it signed by their doctor**, and return it to the classroom Health and Safety Representative. Please ensure that your co-op is using the most recent version of this form, located on the website under Resources:
<https://www.northseattlecoops.org/resources/resources-for-coops/>
2. *Health and Safety Reps* post a copy of the Medical Emergency Response Forms in an agreed upon location onsite in the classroom and notify (at parent meeting, via email, or both) parents, the classroom teacher and parent education instructor of allergies in the group.
3. Medications such as epi-pens, asthma inhalers, etc. needed to treat severe allergic reactions should be provided by parents and kept on-site in a secure location (outside of the reach of children) that is known to all adults in the co-op.
4. When new children join the group, repeat steps 1 through 3.

Note that allergy concerns are not limited to snack. Classroom activities (sensory table, play-dough, etc.) may also present risks to children with allergies.

WHAT TO SERVE AT SNACK TIME

Most snacks consist of a dry food such as crackers that may be purchased in large quantities by the co-op and a fresh fruit or vegetable brought by a parent. Some schools/classes have the families bring their child's snack each day. We ask that even in this case, parents still eliminate foods that children in the class and/or school have serious allergies to, since children are likely to want to try each other's foods, drop food, and may leave residue on tables or chairs that a child in another class could be exposed to.

Determining what is appropriate to serve for snack may be a challenge for co-ops. Not only do food allergies and intolerances need to be accommodated, parents' *preferences* for what their child eats are often different. We encourage schools that have shared snack to encourage families to see it as a learning opportunity for children to try new foods and learn about different foods from a variety of families and cultures.

Below is a list of different ways NSC co-ops have worked through these issues.

- *Health and Safety Rep* works with parents of children with allergies and intolerances to put together a short list of snacks that all parents can bring as needed. This list is then presented and reviewed/revised/approved by all parents at the parent meeting.
- *Create a snack sheet* or provide information in your school handbook with 1) the list of approved snack foods (or list of foods to be avoided), and 2) instructions on snack preparation (how to cut fruits/veggies so they're not a choking hazard), clean-up, and hygiene. Post the snack information and choking brochure in the snack room and distribute to parents. <https://cdn.kingcounty.gov/-/media/king-county/depts/dph/documents/health-safety/health-programs-services/child-care-health/nutrition-food-safety/prevent-choking-in-children.pdf?rev=a60660dff2b84da2ac0cddde8c192228a&hash=1836C6EF20C122EAA17C6F3809CE4C93>
- If allergies and intolerances are related to dry food snacks, *Parents* of children with allergies/intolerances may choose to purchase dry food snacks for the entire quarter/year and receive reimbursement from the co-op.
- *Sugar* is a common concern among parents, and many co-ops agree to keep sugary snacks to a minimum.

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