

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT SEVERE FOOD ALLERGIES

May is Food Allergy Awareness Month in Canada! There are over 2.6 million Canadians, including almost 500,000 children, living with food allergies, which means they experience an exaggerated immune response to a foreign substance. This is especially scary for children with severe allergies, however, it is important to discuss these things with **everyone** – food allergies or not – so we can all look out for each other.

Conversation Starters

- Are there any friends in your class that have food allergies or carry an EpiPen?
- Do you know which foods your classmate is allergic to?
- Do you know how to keep your classmate safe?

Explaining Anaphylaxis

All kids have experienced being sick, so a non-allergy child can relate to it. Feeling sick feels yucky and no one wants to feel that way – that's why it's important to keep foods that can make our friends sick far away from them. Compare it to a time a sibling was sick and you asked your child to play in another room and wash up often with soap and water to ward off germs.

Auto-injector devices such as and EpiPen carries the medicine Epinephrine (adrenaline). This medicine could save the life of someone experiencing anaphylaxis. If a classmate is carrying one, let your child know that it is important medicine, only to be used by that student in an emergency.

Some Ways to Keep Our Friends With Allergies Safe

- Washing hands with soap helps ensure we don't accidentally transfer the food we were eating with our hands to something a food-allergic classmate might then touch. Soap is the only effective way to remove food allergens. Hand sanitizers do not remove food proteins.
- Keep your snacks or lunch to yourself because sharing could be dangerous for a student with food allergies.
- If you are sending in treats to a classroom to celebrate your child's birthday, consider sending in non-food items instead such as a stickers, pencils, or an item the entire class can enjoy together like your child's favourite board game or book.

Don't Underestimate Your Child's Empathy

Children are naturally empathetic and caring. One way to help children understand their peers' allergies is to use this built-in strength. By educating your child about food allergies in age-appropriate ways, they can become advocates for their food-allergic friends. Here 's an example: 'Sally, your friend Amanda is allergic to milk. This means Amanda can't have anything to eat or drink that contains milk or it could make her very sick. Would you like to learn more so that you can help her avoid her allergens?' Sally's care and concern for Amanda will naturally want her to learn more.

https://foodallergycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/FAC-Fact-sheet_April2019.pdf

<https://www.babble.com/body-mind/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-severe-food-allergies/>