

Practical approach to management of food allergy in UK secondary schools

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Health Education Trust: Project Director & Trustee

UK charity formed 1993: School health education issues e.g. school food- advice & guidance for schools & food industry

School Governor : Local secondary school

Food To Fit: Consultant nutritionist for the food industry

Clients include several fresh and dried fruit & nut operators

Health Education Trust

- **Initiated School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs)**
 - Food committee: pupils, staff, parents, caterers, school nurse
 - Set & review policy on healthy living, food & nutrition
 - Ensure consistent messages within lessons & in food service
- **First proposed whole school approach**
 - Involves & engages whole school in making positive changes to all aspects of school life
- **Pushed for healthy school vending**
 - Government funded pilot studies of healthy vending in schools
 - Real Choice product compliance scheme
- **Nutritionally compliant menus service- Dinner Lady Menus to Go**

Food Allergy: UK schools situation

- Food allergy in school age children is significant issue
- High media profile has added to confusion & misinformation
- Government School Food Based Standards (September 2006) banned all unhealthy convenience snacks & soft drinks
(www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/the-standards)
 - **Only allowed nuts, seeds & dried fruit with no added fat, salt, sugar; water, milks & juices**
- Many schools ban nuts in the belief that this effectively deals with the issue!

CONCERN: milk, nuts & dried fruit are potentially important snacks to help schools achieve the nutrient standards

School Food Trusts Cooks Panel results on provision of nuts in school

- 89% primary & 73% secondary school cooks could cater for pupils with any food allergy
- 66% primary & 46% secondary schools have a written nut policy
- The most frequently mentioned specific allergies were to dairy, gluten/wheat, eggs, and nuts. Others included seafood, tomato, latex & soya
- 19% primary & 39% secondary allow pupils to bring nuts into school, BUT
- 34% primary & 51% secondary ***don't know*** if children can bring nuts into school
- Even with no official nut policy in place, some cooks reported avoiding nuts in the menu

Are nuts permitted at breaks, in tuck-shops, vending & after school clubs?

	Primary		Secondary	
	n	%	n	%
Nuts are not permitted in any food outlet in school	56	91.8	31	77.5
Nuts are permitted in controlled vending machines only	0	-	2	5.0
Nuts are permitted in any food outlet in school	5	8.2	7	17.5

SFT school cooks panel, December 2010

Anaphylaxis Campaign opinions

Nut bans in school:

“...impossible to provide an absolute nut-free guarantee so the danger is that allergic children may be led into a false sense of security. “

“...food-allergic children will gain a better awareness of their allergies, and learn avoidance strategies, if they move in an environment where allergens may turn up unexpectedly.”

<http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/information/Schools/managing-the-condition.aspx>

School Food Trust opinions

“Nuts and seeds provide a healthy alternative to crisps, chocolate and sweets, which can no longer be provided in schools.”

“Nuts and seeds are good sources of energy, fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals and essential fatty acids; key components of a healthy balanced diet.”

<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/the-standards/other-important-information/provision-of-nuts-in-schools>

The 14 recognised major allergens:

Celery, Fish, Crustaceans, Egg, Mustard,
Milk, Cereals containing gluten: barley,
kamut, oats, rye, spelt, wheat, Nuts:
almond, brazil nut, cashew, hazelnut,
macadamia nut, pecan nut, pistachio nut,
Queensland nut, walnut, Peanuts, Sesame,
Soya, Sulphur dioxide and sulphites,
Molluscs and Lupin

NB Many have potential to contribute significant nutrients to school food

'10 -18% of food allergy or anaphylaxis reactions occur at school'

Muraro *et al* (2010) position paper

Schools offer a controlled environment for preparing teens for life

Best opportunity at school to

- ✓ Educate and prepare allergic children for tackling allergy in the outside world (where risks significantly higher)
- ✓ Educate everyone- staff, caterers, parents, students on facts around food allergy *and* correct misinformation
- ✓ Inclusive whole school approach
- ✓ Reduce stigmatisation

NB Further development of this inclusive approach in UK, where the problem is greater could provide a learning opportunity too for other EU Countries

Best Practice Guidance: allergy – aware vending & snacking in UK Secondary Schools

Guidance designed to reduce risk of allergic reactions brought about by snack foods in a secondary school or college environment

Higgs J (2008) Balancing food allergy in schools and achieving the school food standards: Can school vending help resolve the ensuing conflict? *Nutrition and Food Science*. **38**; 440-445.
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=1746682>

HET toolkit available from
http://www.healthedtrust.com/pages/vending_in_schools-2.htm

This guidance is designed to reduce the risk of allergic reactions brought about by snack foods in a secondary school environment. It could be adapted for sixth form colleges. Vending machines are not available, or currently recommended in primary schools.

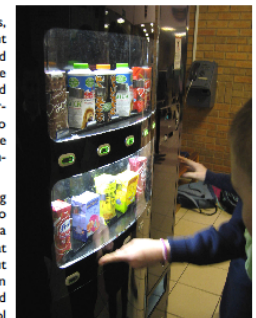
Toolkit contents:

Introduction & benefits of healthy vending	2
Allergy aware vending – options and recommendations	2
Minimising risks of allergic incident	2
School responsibilities	2
Minimising cross-contamination risks	4
Whole school approach to raising awareness	6

Best Practice Guidance on reducing the risk of an allergic reaction from snacking in Secondary School via vending

During the secondary school years, students become more independent especially as regards their food choices and hence will need to take greater responsibility for their food allergy. Although this presents certain challenges, the opportunity to prepare students for the outside world whilst in a “managed” environment should not be overlooked.

Within an educational setting schools can help pupils to learn to manage personal food allergies in a semi-protected environment, that avoids them becoming blasé about the potential risks. Additionally, an effective policy for educating and managing food allergies in school enables all students and staff to appreciate and distinguish the realities and myths of food allergies. Due to the radical changes in the Governments School Food Standards (DfES 2006a), and the drive to increase school food uptake, the consequent increased demand on school catering means that there is



a need for greater food and beverage outlets within schools, to reduce the inevitable queuing and accommodate shorter breaks. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in snacking outlets in schools, some of which may not be supervised, therefore precautions are required to minimise the risk of an allergic reaction.

Robust risk management approach

Many of the major food allergens (see p4), such as milk, eggs, fish, nuts and peanuts can make a very valuable contribution to a child’s diet. Whilst not underestimating the potential risks associated with food allergens for some individuals, there is a need to provide every opportunity for all children to achieve a nutritious diet especially whilst at school. Banning economical and convenient snack foods such as nuts, peanuts and seeds would not support this policy objective. Having a robust risk management approach, however, including vending in schools will support it. Hence this best-practice guidance for “allergy-aware” vending practices in schools.

Vending allergen containing foods offers potential solution

- **Allows positive management of major allergens in a controlled and safer environment**
- **Secure operation of a vending machine can help to minimise the risks of allergic reactions**
- **Ambient or refrigerated, fresh food vending machines & cashless systems with personalised card readers**
- **Enables healthy snacks such as nuts seeds and milk drinks to be encouraged for right reasons- ie their nutritional contribution to adolescent diet**

School Food Trust focus group work

Aim: To explore current approaches to the provision of nuts & management of nut allergies in secondary schools

Key findings/recommendations:

- Mismatch - nut-free menus offered yet pupils with nut allergies opt for packed lunches!
- There is a need for secondary schools to have more detailed and specific management policies around food allergy
- Further guidance & case studies on how to manage food allergies would be helpful
- **A simplistic ban approach is not a fail-safe management strategy**
- The SNAG process is valuable and effective in managing food related matters within schools

School Food Trust focus group work

- Time is right to run well controlled pilots in secondary schools to
 - fine-tune toolkit for allergy-aware snacking
 - establish case studies as examples of good practice to reassure & guide other countries/ schools to practice a more proactive and effective management of food allergy for teenagers whilst at school
- Develop practical guidance toolkits adaptable for EU schools

Comments from focus groups with secondary schools during SFT focus group

“We don’t want to limit the foods that others can eat by having a nut ban, especially as we are well enough aware of our own allergies”

Pupil with a nut allergy

“Pupils must be appropriately educated to then be able to make their own personal choices. Part of this is learning how to manage the consequences of their actions”

Teacher

“There should not be a nut ban, it is our responsibility to manage the situation”

Pupil with nut allergy