



**DANNON INSTITUTE®**

*Nutrition for Health*



# NUTS

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Food allergies – abnormal immune system responses to foods or food additives – are on the rise among school children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 3 million children under age 18 years (3.9%) reported a food or digestive allergy in 2007, representing an 18% increase in prevalence over 10 years. The CDC also found that children with food allergies are up to four times more likely than kids without food allergies to also have asthma and other allergic reactions. A survey of School Nutrition Association (SNA) members named peanuts and tree nuts (almonds, pecans, walnuts, cashews) among the top life-threatening food allergens in their school.

Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act and Part B of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) do not consider children with food allergies to have a disability. For these children, school food service may, but is not required to, provide food substitutions. However, if a food allergy is life-threatening, it meets the definition of a disability and requires a prescription for food substitutions from the child's licensed physician. The responsibility falls on school food service personnel to ensure that all foods served to the child meet the prescribed guidelines.

Individual states and school districts may have more stringent policies. Rhode Island's Food Allergy Law (RI 2008 Public Law 08-086), for example, calls for policies, individual health care plans and emergency health care plans for students with potentially life-threatening peanut and/or tree nut allergies. While the SNA survey found that many schools ban peanuts and peanut butter entirely, less stringent measures can ensure the safety of students with nut allergies:

- Require school food service staff to check product labels for nuts on the ingredient list of foods served, and to avoid cross-contaminating foods with utensils used in nut products.
- Consult with the student's parents about restricted foods.
- Designate nut-free tables or areas in the cafeteria.
- Educate school personnel about nut allergies, signs of anaphylaxis, and emergency procedures.

*Ms. Hermann specializes in health communications for parents and children. Her articles have appeared in major health, women's, and parenting magazines and websites. She has worked with the Dannon Institute for the last ten years.*

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