



Allergy Safe Food Lessons – Checklist for Schools

Headteachers and school governors have a legal duty to make accommodation for students with medical conditions including allergies. There is a responsibility to both keep a child with allergies safe, but also to allow them equitable access to the school curriculum.

5-8% of children in the UK have a food allergy, that's 1 to 2 in every class of 30. Teaching food and nutrition to students with allergies is a great responsibility. They face the challenge of planning ingredients, budgets, use of equipment and cross contamination and must have the support to do so safely. Increasingly non-specialist staff members are thrust into teaching food and find themselves solely responsible for writing risk assessments, liaising with families and managing multiple dietary requirements preparing for lessons and monitoring systems.

No room for error – understanding food allergy

Allergic reactions are caused by the immune system responding to a food it mistakenly sees as harmful and they can be life-threatening. Sometimes, even a trace amount of their allergen will make someone very unwell. People with food allergies must completely avoid eating and should avoid touching the food to which they are allergic. Therefore, education settings must have rigorous procedures in place to reduce risk for students with allergies during food lessons. These procedures should cover the safe storage, preparation, and cooking of food, including avoiding cross-contamination and the safe consumption of food.

The importance of food lesson in schools

Cooking and nutrition are compulsory in state-maintained schools for students in Key Stage 1-3 and are taught as part of the Design and Technology curriculum. There are GCSE exam courses in cooking and food related areas, for example Food Preparation and Nutrition, Hospitality and Catering. While understanding food and nutrition is important for all young people, students with food allergies have a great deal to gain from understanding ingredients, food labelling and cooking from scratch, to support them as they grow older. Food lessons and activities involving food should be planned and risk-assessed with students with allergies in mind. These students should not be excluded, and teachers should be given adequate training and support to ensure all students can access food lessons safely.

How our checklist can support your school

The checklist overleaf outlines good practice that should be implemented by senior leaders where a setting teaches food and/or nutrition. You can use the checklist to identify how many of the measures you already have in place, and where more work needs to be done to create safety for people with allergies in the delivery of food lessons, as well as proper support of your teachers and school staff who deliver this crucial part of the curriculum.





Checklist for allergy safety in school food lessons

The school endeavours to make it possible for every child with allergies to take part in food activities and lessons.

STAFF TRAINING AND SCHOOL POLICY

- Training is in place for all staff teaching food lessons with students that covers: food safety and hygiene, allergy awareness and risk reduction, reading and understanding food labels, and guidance to avoid cross contamination. See Food Teaching guidance.
- Up to date and renewable first aid training is provided to anyone leading food lessons, including how to recognise and treat allergic reactions and how to use an adrenaline autoinjector pen (AAI) if you suspect anaphylaxis.
- There is a school Allergy and Anaphylaxis policy which sets out clear roles and responsibilities for allergy management, training and risk reduction, and this has been communicated to anyone with a role in food teaching.

LESSON PLANNING AND RISK ASSESSMENTS

- Food teaching staff are provided with up-to-date information about students' dietary requirements and medical conditions including copies of Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs) are available.
- Food teaching staff are provided with SLT support to chase up parents who are not forthcoming with medical information relating to allergies.
- A designated second staff member or school nurse is identified to support solo or inexperienced food teachers with lesson planning and writing risk assessments.
- Communication is initiated with parents/ carers of students with allergies about suitability of proposed dishes and how to mitigate risk of a pupil's allergens are being used in class.
- Food teaching staff are given additional time to develop safe menus and source ingredients from trusted sources, including input from catering teams where appropriate.
- Budget is made available for subsidising allergen-free alternatives, so safe ingredients can be supplied (eg dairy free spread for students with milk allergy). In some instances where a pupil is highly sensitive, this may mean providing this alternative for all students as well as deep-cleaned equipment.
- Allergy awareness is brought into the class, for example baking with egg substitute as a learning opportunity.





EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

Clean equipment, clothing and workspace is provided for students with allergies. This would include:

- One or more dedicated sets of utensils and kitchen equipment for use by students with allergies. These should be deep cleaned between sessions by a responsible adult to remove all allergens and stored safely.
- A second set of separate washing up facilities eg. cloths and brushes is made available.
- Aprons that have been deep cleaned between sessions are available for students with allergies.
- The workspace that has been cleaned thoroughly by an adult ahead of a lesson for a pupil with allergy.
- Students with allergies are distanced from their allergen – meaning either space between workstations, or students nearby using alternative ingredients that don't contain their allergen to avoid contamination.
- Risk of shared ovens has been assessed and mitigated. Consider reducing the use of the fan and put allergen-free dishes at the top of the oven
- Time is factored in for teachers to change clothing in an appropriate area between lessons to avoid transfer of allergens like flour which cling to clothing as well as planning for the safe storage of those items.

PUPIL PREPARATION

- Students in the class are informed if a student's allergen(s) is being used and the steps the class needs to take to reduce risk of contamination to keep their peer safe. This may be via an email to parents or presentation to students.
- Upcoming lessons are discussed with students with allergies to reassure them about measures to keep them safe and that they will be included. This may include an email sent out to parents at the start of the term.
- Students are encouraged to become responsible for managing their allergy, but are reminded that staff are there to support them.
- The importance of food safety is discussed with every class, including allergy safety, at the start of every half term. This may be supplemented by a whole-school assembly on the subject.

FOODS TO BE EATEN

- A system is agreed where an additional staff member has the time and responsibility to double-check the ingredients of any food which is shared with students for tasting sessions, cookery, or food related activities, and food sharing is supervised.
- Any food wrapped or boxed to be taken home or for consumption later must be clearly labelled so that there is no risk of a pupil with allergies eating the wrong food - it is good practice to add a food label recording if any of the 14 main allergens are present in a dish.

WIDER SUPPORT

- There is a clear system for reporting allergic reaction incidents or near-misses.
- Senior leadership support is available for staff feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

