

September 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian,

You have probably all seen the news stories on the growing number of children with life-threatening food allergies. Deaths from allergic reactions to food occur every year across America and one death is one too many from something that might have been prevented. These children, who are perfectly healthy and normal in every way, must watch and be careful about every bite they eat or risk suffering a severe or even life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. Food allergies have become a major health issue in this country. Anyone can develop this kind of allergy at any age, but younger children seem to be at greater risk.

First-time allergic reactions can occur anywhere including the school environment. The proteins from tree nuts and peanuts seem to be most often associated with anaphylaxis after ingestion or other exposures. All tree nuts and peanuts are part of the FDA required foods to be listed on manufacturer's ingredient labels. The other six most common foods that people are allergic to and that must be listed on ingredient labels are fish, shellfish, soy, wheat, egg and milk.

The Rochester Community School District wants to reduce the possibility of our students with severe allergies being exposed to their allergens. To do this, we are taking a multi-pronged approach to prevention and have developed a Handbook with guidelines on allergy avoidance, education, and emergency readiness for all of our students. This guide can be found on our Web site. We realize that the biggest part of avoidance is education, and that involves not just families directly involved, but to be safe, the entire school community.

We have not declared our schools "Nut Free", as some districts have done, for several reasons. First, this is a claim that cannot be guaranteed and we feel that it would lead to a false sense of security. "Allergy Aware" and "No Peanut/Tree Nut Classrooms" are the phrases and controls that best describe our efforts to keep allergic students safe. In this way we best plan for each allergic child as best suits their needs. Due to the high number of students who are allergic to peanuts/tree nuts at Long Meadow, we have labeled all of our classrooms with known allergies "No Peanut/No Tree Nut Classrooms". This is not a change from last year. Celebrations will also focus on foods that are nut free and safe for everyone in all classrooms. Students may have nut products during lunch. There will be a "No Peanut/Tree Nut Table", just as in the past, to make sure all students are safe from life-threatening allergens.

Long Meadow will also continue to celebrate birthdays with ***Birthday Pencils*** and sharing the child's name on our morning announcements. Families may choose to donate a book to their classroom or a recess game for students to enjoy. This follows the district guidelines of non-edible birthday celebrations. Students will visit the office for a special pencil on their special day!

We appreciate your support of guideline restrictions and procedures when they may require your cooperation. Below is the shared goal from our Handbook on allergies that we would like to see everyone embrace.

***Shared goal: Students with life-threatening food allergies will over time develop greater independence to keep themselves safe from anaphylactic reactions. School communities will differentiate risk reduction strategies for students with food allergies reflecting the same generous spirit and understanding as is demonstrated for students with differentiated learning styles and other health-related student needs.***

Sincerely,

Kelly Dessy  
Principal, Long Meadow Elementary