

# Starting Kinder or Preschool With Food Allergies

*Starting Kindergarten/Pre-school can be an anxious time for many families who have children at risk of severe food allergic reactions or anaphylaxis. Childcare facilities can implement several strategies to help reduce the risk of an allergic reaction. This information provides your family with ideas on what strategies can assist everyone with daily management.*

## Before Starting What Do I Do?

Prior to your child commencing pre-school make a suitable time to meet with the staff to discuss your child's individual medical history and needs. Discuss any perceived high-risk times. A Management Plan that includes risk minimisation strategies should then be developed specifically to help meet your child's needs. Keep staff informed about any changes or updated allergy tests that may occur during the year.

Talk with staff about also trying to educate other families about the seriousness of food allergy through the centre's newsletter or a letter sent home at the start of the year. Gentle reminders about strategies implemented to reduce the risk of allergic reactions could also be included in the newsletter at regular intervals.

## Medical Kit

Prior to your child attending Kindergarten you must provide an **Anaphylaxis Action Plan** signed by your doctor. The parent must provide a Medical Kit (containing the Action Plan and medication, including an adrenaline auto injector, EpiPen®) when the child commences at the Kinder/Preschool. (This needs to be at the Kinder whenever the child at risk of a severe allergic reaction is present) Your child's name, allergic triggers, list of contents and recent photo can be placed on the lid and container. Use the same photo on all items to ensure consistency.

The Medical Kit should be stored out of direct sunlight and be easily accessible in the event of an emergency. It must NOT be in a locked cupboard or locked room. Place a pen/marker in the kit so that the time the EpiPen® is given can be recorded in an emergency.

## Treat Box

A Treat Box is used for any special events such as birthdays so fill it with a variety of safe items, which the staff/child can choose from when a treat is required. Discuss a non-food reward option for all the children. Staff can give stamps and stickers to acknowledge positive behaviours and good work or even as a special treat.

Provide cup cakes in a clearly labelled container with your child's name on it. These cup cakes can be given to the child with food allergy when non-allergic children bring in birthday cakes. Store the cup cakes in the Kindergarten freezer and defrost them at the beginning of the session.

## Anaphylaxis Emergency Telephone Card

Have a card detailing the name of the child at risk of anaphylaxis, their age and their allergies, the facilities phone number, address and nearest cross streets near the central telephone. This information needs to be accessed quickly by emergency response personnel in the event of an emergency.



# Starting Kinder or Preschool With Food Allergies

## Morning/Lunch/Afternoon Tea Ideas

The safest option is for parents to always provide food for their food allergic preschooler whilst they are in care. If this is not an option, it is critical that the parent speaks with the chef who prepares food for all the children. Some changes may need to be made to remove high-risk foods from the childcare environment. Food minimisation is one of several strategies that help with management in the early childhood environment.

Ask the staff how/where the children eat their meals and snacks. Do they eat at tables, on the floor, in small groups or in a large group? How are children supervised? Will your child need very close supervision during eating because of their age or lack of understanding? Discuss food sharing or food swapping amongst children with kinder staff. How will the kinder educate all children about not sharing food? Your child should not be isolated from their peers because of their allergy. Education and safety measures assist with including children at risk of anaphylaxis in kinder or preschool.

Storage of snack/ lunch containers should ideally be in the kitchen area, not in backpacks or locker area. The child's food items are then protected from other children handling the contents or mixing up containers. (Staff will be required to bring out snacks/ lunch at appropriate times and place them back in kitchen area when finished). Separate drink bottles/cups should be clearly labelled with child's name and allergy and kept somewhere separate from other children's drinks. (An easily identifiable sticker can help a child recognise their cup if they are unable to read their name in written form)

## Special Events/ Excursions/ Kinder Duty

Inform staff that you will need to be given prior notice of special events. Discuss how staff intend to supervise your child without isolating them or restricting them unnecessarily. Will it be necessary for you, the caregiver, to stay for the event or attend the excursion? Parent helpers must be educated on safe foods to provide for their toddlers whilst on Kinder duty or at special events. Any other visitor must be informed about safe food practises and strategies implemented to help reduce the risk of allergic reactions (i.e. pre-school specialists, trades people, committee members etc).

## In Finishing

All staff will need to undertake **anaphylaxis training** and will need to know how and when to administer the adrenaline auto injector (i.e. EpiPen®) in the event of an emergency as per the individual's Anaphylaxis Action Plan. All staff need to be aware of the centre's anaphylaxis management guidelines/policy.

Above all it is vital you communicate and build a strong relationship with the Kindergarten staff to ensure you trust in their professional care and they feel supported as well. Ask lots of questions, offer suggestions where appropriate and arrange regular meetings to review progress and make changes deemed necessary. Become a partner in your child's care. Caring for a child at risk of anaphylaxis can initially be overwhelming for staff and they need your ongoing support. Be open to negotiation on 'do-able' best management practises, which will allow your child to have a fun time at childcare.

Implementation of a few simple strategies enables your child to participate in a fun environment with minimal risks to their health and safety.

*Thanks to Kylie Sanderson, a kindergarten teacher and mother of a child with life threatening food allergies, for initiating and contributing to this information for those starting kinder.*

