

COMMACK UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Commack Middle School

Commack High School

September 1, 2023

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Increasingly, we have been made aware of the number of students in our schools who have food allergies. Allergies occur when the body interprets a substance as being harmful and then releases a chemical called histamine to protect itself. This allergic reaction can be mild (gastro-intestinal discomfort; itchy eyes, nose, mouth, skin) to severe or life - threatening (respiratory, cardiac). The level of sensitivity to a substance also varies. Some people will only have a reaction if they ingest the food while others can have a serious reaction by touching or smelling/breathing in that food.

Foods that most commonly cause allergic symptoms in children are peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, soy, fish/shellfish and wheat.

As you know, the Commack School District has made a strong commitment to ensuring the physical health and safety of all our students as well as to the emotional needs of our students. To that end, the district has instituted new procedures and guidelines relative to the presence of food in our classrooms. We have summarized below some of the most significant protocols in this area. Both Commack Middle School and Commack High School are instituting these protocols throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

NOTE: The use of the term “severe allergy/allergies” is used throughout this letter. For purposes of this letter, severe is defined as any allergy that is life-threatening and for which the student has been prescribed Epinephrine.

Parent Responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian of the student to notify the school nurse by the first day of school (classes) of any allergies that require accommodations within the school environment. *Parents are strongly encouraged to notify the district of such needs as far in advance (i.e. spring preceding start of new school year) as possible.*
 - Notification must include current (within one year) documentation from the treating physician clearly stating:
 - All food or other items to which the individual is allergic
 - Allergy levels
 - Whether Epinephrine is prescribed and the dates such treatment has been required in the past
 - **It is the parent’s responsibility to supply the school with the student’s Epinephrine.**

School Responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of the school to notify the staff, by the first day of school (classes)* of any student who has severe allergies and the protocols and procedures to maintain a safe school environment for that student.

** In the event that the parent has not notified the school prior to the first day or that the student begins school after the first day, the school will notify the staff within twenty-four (24) hours of receiving such notification.*

- The school will provide appropriate training for staff members.
- Emergency kits will be provided for personnel.
- The school will provide educational programs for students.
- The school has instituted protocols to better ensure the safety of all students and staff members relative to allergies.

Practices and Protocols

Food in Schools

- Food items and/or food containers are not to be used in any classrooms for instructional purposes. This includes the use of food items as manipulatives and/or rewards*. This also includes the making/baking/creating of food items as part of lessons and units of study unless in a FACS class or Functional Academics class. Teachers are to use other instructional materials and activities to help motivate students.

**This excludes specific cases in which food items as primary reinforcers are approved elements of a student's BIP.*

- In each classroom, two desks will be identified as "NO FOOD" desks. No food of any kind can be eaten at that desk at any time. This will provide any student for whom it is necessary, assurance that a safe desk is available in each room.

Signage

- Posters relative to signs of anaphylaxis; first aid for anaphylaxis and use of Epinephrine will be posted through the schools, including instructional areas and especially in the cafeterias and lunchrooms.
- Any classroom to which a student with a severe food allergy is assigned will be identified and no outside activities that include the use or making of food will be allowed in that classroom. A sign proclaiming that room as a "Safe Food Zone"* will be posted. Un-safe foods will be listed. The signs will be consistent throughout the district.

****The use of the safe Food Zone signs is meant to serve as another means to limit the presence of food allergens in specific areas in the schools. It should in no way be interpreted as assurance that there are no such allergens present. The Commack School District cannot provide a guarantee that they are not or have never been present.***

Lunch Rooms/Cafeterias

- A Safe Food Table will be provided for each lunch period.
- Specific cleaning protocols will be followed for the table.

A full report (***“Recommendations for Managing Students’ and Staff Members’ Environmental Needs Relative to Allergies Within the Commack School District Learning Environments”***) is available on the Commack Website. If you wish to learn more about this subject, please refer to that document which is detailed and specific.

Questions about your school’s procedures should be directed to the building principal.

Concerns about your own child’s environmental needs should be directed to your school nurse.

It is our goal to ensure that each student is able to participate fully in our educational programs in the safest possible environment. We appreciate the efforts of all of our families to support us in this endeavor.

Regards,

Dr. Michael Larson

Mrs. Carrie Lipenholtz

Mr. Timothy Russo, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment