



A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Are Schools Doing Enough for Food-Allergic Kids?

In recent years, media and medical attention has turned to emerging concerns about life-threatening food allergies in children. What has received comparatively little notice is what actions schools are taking to manage the problem of children's food allergies.

The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents with children age 0-13 years about food allergies and what their children's daycare/preschools and elementary schools are doing to accommodate children with food allergies.

Children with Food Allergies

In this Poll, 3% of parents report having a child in their family who has a life-threatening food allergy.

Among families, 22% of parents with a child in daycare/preschool and 25% of parents with a child in elementary school report knowing a child with a life-threatening food allergy in their children's school setting.

Accommodations in School Settings

Parents who knew of a child with a life-threatening food allergy were asked whether schools had accommodations for food allergies, including: bans on treats/food brought from home, a posted or required food allergy plan, separate eating areas for children with food allergies, staff training for food allergies, or special classroom assignments.

Overall, 83% of parents report that their children's daycare or preschool provides one or more accommodations for children with food allergies. 79% of parents report their children's elementary schools provide accommodations (Table 1).

Table 1. Parent Report of Accommodations For Food Allergies In Schools

Daycare/Preschool	Elementary School
83%	79%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Report Highlights

- About one-quarter of parents know of a child with a life-threatening food allergy in their children's school or daycare.
- About three-quarters of parents who know of a food-allergic child say their children's school/daycare makes accommodations for children with food allergies.
- About one-half of parents who know of a food-allergic child do not find it inconvenient to make accommodations for children with food allergies.

Bans on treats or food brought from home were the most common accommodation— with nearly two-thirds of parents indicating their children's daycare or preschool has this policy and one-half indicating their children's elementary school has this policy (Table 2).

Posted or required food allergy plans and special classroom assignments were more common in daycare/preschool than in elementary settings. Conversely, separate eating areas were more common in elementary school than in daycare/preschool (Table 2).

Table 2. Specific Accommodations For Food Allergies In Schools

Accommodation	Daycare/Preschool	Elementary School
Ban on treats/food brought from home	63%	50%
Posted or required food allergy plan	56%	37%
Separate eating areas	14%	28%
Special classroom assignment	15%	8%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Staff Training For Food Allergies

About one-half of parents indicate that their children's daycare, preschool, or elementary school has staff training specifically for food allergies (Table 3).

Table 3. Staff Training For Food Allergies

Daycare/Preschool	Elementary School
48%	52%

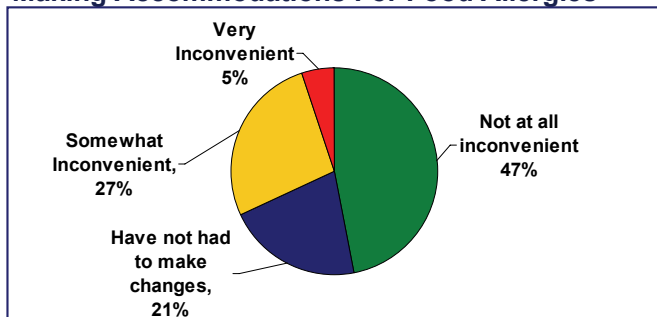
Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Acceptability of Accommodations

Among families with food allergic children, one-half of parents believe that others at school accommodate their children's life-threatening food allergy "very well" and 44% of parents say their children's food allergy is "somewhat" accommodated.

Nearly one-half of parents without food allergic children say it is "not at all inconvenient" to make accommodations with food or the handling of food at the request of a school or food allergic family. About one-quarter say it is "somewhat inconvenient" and few say that it is "very inconvenient" (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Parent Report of Inconvenience with Making Accommodations For Food Allergies



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Implications

Based on this Poll, children in 3% of US households are affected by life-threatening food allergies. This is consistent with other studies of food allergies. As a result, about one-quarter of parents in the US are aware of food-allergic children in their own children's school settings.

This is the first assessment of parents' perceptions of school accommodations to the problem of food allergies. Many schools and daycare settings appear to have incorporated one or more food allergy accommodations. Most parents of food-allergic children feel that their children's schools have at least somewhat accommodated their children's needs.

But how do the parents without food-allergic children feel? Many such parents feel that the schools' accommodations have not been inconvenient, or that they have not had to make changes to their usual food routines. Nevertheless, about one-third of parents reported that it was inconvenient to make accommodations for food-allergic children; this raises concerns about potential obstacles to expanding accommodations to other daycares and schools that have not yet adopted them. Further work by advocacy groups and educational information will need to reach out to all community members to improve the perception and impact that food allergies can have on individuals and families.

Increasing staff training may be the greatest opportunity to enhance schools' response to food-allergic children. School nurses or community health professionals could disseminate messages and training regarding effective food allergy responses. In the past, the burden of enhancing awareness and preparedness at the school level has often fallen on affected families. With food-allergy prevalence at current levels, health care workers and school personnel can be asked to fill this need instead.

At the intersection of health and education, the needs of food-allergic children are leading to fundamental changes at daycares, preschools, and elementary schools. The attitudes of parents without food-allergic children may strongly influence how quickly schools adopt food allergy policies in the future.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in January 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,552) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 62% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error for this sample is plus or minus 3 to 7 percentage points. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

Child Health Evaluation
and Research Unit



University of Michigan

**C.S. Mott Children's Hospital
National Poll on Children's Health**
Director: Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP
Associate Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH
Faculty Collaborator: Harvey L. Leo, MD
Manager & Editor: Dianne C. Singer, MPH
Data Analyst: Amy T. Butchart, MPH
Contact us! Email: NPCH@med.umich.edu
<http://www.med.umich.edu/mott/npch>

This Report includes research findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, which do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.