



We all know that school districts want to keep their students safe and serve nutritious meals to foster their development and academic performance. But removing peanuts from menus isn't the solution.

Research shows that allergen management is the safer, more effective approach, endorsed by experts and organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology.

Peanuts are a staple in school meals, offering nutrition, versatility, and affordability that students enjoy. By following best practices, schools can safely reintroduce peanuts and ensure inclusivity for all students.

Best Practices for Allergen Management in Schools

- Create a Comprehensive Plan
- Train Staff Regularly
- Implement Safe Food Handling Procedures
- Communicate with Administration, Parents & Students
- Empower Students for Self-Management of Allergies
- Offer Allergen-Safe Alternatives

What the Research Says: Quick Facts

“Peanut-free” schools still report reactions and often higher epinephrine use.

In a study analyzing 567 food allergy reactions in a Canadian pediatric cohort, researchers found that 4.9% of reactions occurred in “peanut-free” schools compared to 3% of schools that allowed peanut foods (Cherkaoui S., 2015).

When it comes to epinephrine use in schools, a 2017 study of schools in Massachusetts found that schools with policies restricting peanut foods from being brought from home, served in the cafeteria or in the classroom did not have reduced use of epinephrine to treat food allergy reactions compared to schools without peanut-free policies (Bartnikas L., 2017).

Casual contact (i.e. touching peanuts/peanut butter on surfaces) presents extremely low risk.

A study of 30 peanut-allergic children who smelled peanut butter for 10 minutes resulted in zero systemic or respiratory reactions. In this study, skin contact with peanut butter did cause redness and irritation for some where the peanut butter touched skin, but did not cause any serious reaction. (Simonte S., 2003).

A paper documenting the practices of allergists working with peanut allergic patients reported that applying peanut butter to the skin of the patients did not cause any systemic reactions and only caused hives at the site of application for one patient. The allergists also noted a practice of placing peanut butter in close proximity to peanut allergic patients to show that proximity to peanut-containing foods does not cause anaphylaxis (Dinakar C., 2016).

Simple practices like washing hand with soap and water, and using common household cleaners on surfaces can remove peanut proteins to mitigate cross contact (Perry T., 2004).

Experts advise against bans, recommend allergen management plans.

Experts warn that peanut bans can create a false sense of security and potentially increase the risk of accidental exposure. Schools serving peanuts with allergen management plans in place may help increase awareness and vigilance among parents, students, and school personnel against accidental exposure and food allergy reactions (Cherkaoui S., 2015; Bartnikas L., 2017). The 2024 Food Allergy Management in Schools: Expert Recommendations for K-12 report by Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) also states that no high-quality evidence supports the benefit of site-wide bans for preventing allergic reactions (FARE, 2024).

Parents prefer education over bans.

The 2014 C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of 816 parents about how schools should manage lunch and snacks for children with nut allergies. Most parents surveyed (62%) stated that they did not support a school-wide ban on nut-containing products (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2014).

Gaining Stakeholder Buy-in

- Educate decision-makers on research-backed allergen management strategies.
- Provide information and training to school faculty to instill confidence in how you are handling allergens safely.
- Involve parents and students in open conversations about allergy policies

School Success Stories

Many schools across the country have transitioned from peanut bans to allergen-aware policies, allowing for safer and more inclusive meal programs. They have reintroduced peanuts to their menus from elementary school through high school with success and have seen the results in student participation. Visit nationalpeanutboard.org/somethingsmissing for real-world examples, case studies, and resources to help your district serve peanuts safely.

Helpful Resources:

National Peanut Board | PeanutsInSchools.org

School Nutrition Association Allergy Zone | SchoolNutrition.org/food-allergies

FARE | FoodAllergy.org/Resources

CDC | CDC.gov/School-Health-Conditions/Food-Allergies

ServSafe Allergens Training | ServSafe.com/ServSafe-Allergens

FAACT | FoodAllergyAwareness.org

Learn more about allergen management, share your story and find menu inspiration at:

NationalPeanutBoard.org/somethingsmissing

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