

FOOD SAFETY, SAFER EATING & ALLERGIES POLICY

EYFS Statement

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) requires providers to take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well and to be confident that those responsible for preparing and handling food are competent to do so. This policy reflects the EYFS safer eating requirements and supporting Department for Education food safety guidance for early years providers.

Aim

The aim of this policy is to protect children from food-related risks, including choking, allergic reactions, food intolerances, poor food hygiene and unsafe food preparation. It sets out clear expectations for registration information, food preparation, mealtime supervision, allergy management, emergency response and partnership with parents and carers.

This policy is underpinned by effective risk management practices that minimise children's exposure to known allergens, choking hazards and food-borne illness. It promotes clear communication between parents, carers and staff so that each child's individual dietary, medical and developmental needs are fully understood and consistently met. The policy also recognises the importance of staff training and competence in food safety, allergy awareness, safer eating and emergency response procedures. Mealtimes should provide children with positive social experiences in a calm and well-supervised environment where they remain safe, supported and appropriately monitored at all times.

Definitions

- Allergy – a condition in which the body has an exaggerated immune response to a substance, such as a food, medicine, sting or bite.
- Allergen – a substance that can trigger an allergic reaction in a susceptible person.
- Anaphylaxis – a sudden, severe and potentially life-threatening allergic reaction.
- Food intolerance – a difficulty digesting or processing a particular food, which is different from a food allergy but may still require careful management.
- Adrenaline auto-injector (AAI) – an emergency device containing adrenaline, such as an EpiPen, Jext or Emerade, prescribed for the treatment of severe allergic reactions.
- Minimised risk environment – an environment where risk assessments and control measures reduce the likelihood of allergen exposure or choking incidents.
- Health Care Plan – a detailed document outlining a child's condition, dietary requirements, treatment, emergency procedures, medication and staff responsibilities.
- Safer eating – the practice of preparing, serving and supervising food and drink in a way that reduces the risk of choking, allergic reaction, food sharing and food poisoning.

Identifying and Requesting Information at Registration

Before a child is admitted to the setting, the nursery will obtain information about any special dietary requirements, preferences, food allergies, intolerances and special health requirements. This information will be recorded, kept up to date and shared with all staff involved in preparing, handling, serving or supervising food and drink.

At each mealtime and snack time, a named member of staff must be responsible for checking that the food and drink being provided meets each child's dietary requirements and has been prepared in a way that reduces choking risk. Arrangements must also cover staff absence, agency cover, trips and changes to routine.

The nursery will have ongoing discussions with parents and carers and, where appropriate, health professionals to develop and review allergy action plans, Health Care Plans and risk assessments. Information must be updated whenever a child's needs change.

The nursery will also discuss the stage each child is at in relation to introducing solid foods, including the textures the child is familiar with. Decisions about food textures and progression must be based on the child's developmental readiness and parental discussion, not assumptions based on age alone.

When a child is registered, the following information will be obtained from parents or carers:

- Details of any food allergies, intolerances, dietary requirements, cultural or religious dietary needs, food preferences and special health requirements.
- Whether allergies, intolerances or dietary requirements have been diagnosed or advised by a health care professional, such as a GP, registered dietitian, health visitor, allergy nurse or paediatrician.
- Any allergy management plan, Health Care Plan, written medical advice or prescribed medication.
- Clear emergency procedures to follow in the event of an allergic reaction, anaphylaxis, choking incident or other food-related emergency.
- Information about the child's current eating stage, including textures, foods already introduced and any support needed with feeding.

The Role of Staff

All staff are responsible for ensuring that children's dietary requirements, allergies, intolerances and developmental eating needs are understood and met consistently. Staff must follow the nursery's food hygiene procedures, safer eating guidance and allergy management arrangements at all times. The nursery will ensure that all staff involved in preparing, handling, serving or supervising food are appropriately trained and competent to fulfil their responsibilities safely.

Training will include food hygiene, allergy awareness, recognition and treatment of anaphylaxis, choking prevention, safer eating practices and emergency response procedures. At all times when children are eating, a member of staff holding a valid paediatric first aid certificate must be present. Staff should know where emergency medication is kept and be confident in responding quickly and appropriately to choking incidents, allergic reactions or other food-related emergencies. Good hygiene practices, including regular handwashing and effective cleaning of eating areas and equipment, must be promoted throughout the setting.

Allergy Management Oversight

The Nursery Manager is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and ensuring that food safety, safer eating and allergy management arrangements are effectively maintained. This responsibility includes monitoring compliance with Health Care Plans, ensuring staff training remains up to date, reviewing incidents and near misses, overseeing emergency medication arrangements and ensuring that any lessons learned are incorporated into practice.

The Nursery Manager may delegate operational tasks to other appropriately trained members of staff but retains overall responsibility for ensuring that suitable systems are in place to safeguard children with allergies, intolerances and special dietary requirements.

The Nursery Manager will act as the designated Allergy Lead unless another suitably trained senior member of staff is formally appointed. The designated Allergy Lead will coordinate allergy safety arrangements, maintain oversight of training, Health Care Plans, emergency medication, incidents and near misses, and promote consistent practice across the setting.

This policy will be formally reviewed at least annually and sooner following any significant allergy-related incident or near miss, a change in legislation or statutory guidance, or evidence that existing arrangements require improvement.

Food Preparation and Safer Eating

Food will be prepared in a suitable way for each child's individual developmental needs, with parents and carers involved in helping children move to the next stage at a pace that is right for the child. Food must be prepared and served in a way that reduces choking risk.

Supervision and seating

Mealtimes should take place in a calm, organised environment which promotes both children's wellbeing and safe eating habits. Children must be seated appropriately while eating and should remain seated throughout the meal or snack. Wherever possible, food should be consumed in designated eating areas where distractions are minimised and staff are able to supervise effectively.

Children must remain within sight and hearing of staff at all times while eating or drinking. Staff should position themselves so they can observe children closely, support developing eating skills and respond promptly to any concerns. Wherever practicable, staff should sit facing children during meals to help identify signs of choking, discourage food sharing and monitor for any unexpected allergic reactions. Staff should remain vigilant throughout mealtimes, recognising that choking can occur quietly and without obvious signs of distress.

Reducing choking risk

- Remove stones, pips and bones from fruit, meat and fish before serving.
- Cut small round foods, such as grapes, strawberries and cherry tomatoes, lengthways and into quarters.
- Cut large fruits, hard fruit and hard vegetables into slices rather than small chunks. Soften hard fruit and vegetables for babies and remove skins when first introduced.
- Cut sausages into thin strips rather than chunks and remove skins. Sausages should be avoided or limited due to their high salt content.
- Cut cheese into strips rather than chunks and cut bread into strips for very young children. Consider wholemeal or toasted bread where appropriate, as soft white bread can form a doughy ball in the throat.
- Do not give whole nuts or whole seeds to children under five. Crushed or ground nuts and smooth nut butters may only be used where safe for the child and in line with allergy controls.
- Do not give children popcorn, hard sweets, marshmallows or raw jelly cubes from a packet either to eat or as part of messy play, as they are choking hazards.
- Do not offer raisins as a snack to children under 12 months. They may be chopped as part of a meal where appropriate.

Foods and drinks to avoid

- Children under 12 months must not be given honey.
- Children under five must not be given whole nuts, whole peanuts, whole seeds, raw jelly cubes, hard sweets or slush ice drinks.
- Foods high in salt, sugar or saturated fat should be avoided or limited in line with healthy eating guidance.
- Fresh tap water and plain milk should be the main drinks offered. Fruit juice, smoothies, squash, fizzy drinks and flavoured milk should not be routinely provided.
- Rice drinks must not be given to children under five.
- Foods that present a food poisoning risk, such as unpasteurised milk products, fresh pâté and raw shellfish, must not be provided unless safe and appropriate controls are in place.

Infant feeding and weaning

If parents or carers introduce solid foods before around six months, the nursery will work closely with them to ensure a consistent and safe approach. Progression from early purees or mashed foods to more textured, chopped or minced foods must be gradual and based on developmental readiness.

If infant formula is prepared or handled on site, bottles, teats and feeding equipment must be prepared, stored and cleaned hygienically in line with NHS guidance and local food safety procedures.

Allergy and Intolerance Management

Appropriate systems will be maintained to ensure that staff can readily identify children with allergies, intolerances and special dietary requirements whilst complying with data protection requirements. This may include allergy registers, dietary requirement lists, individual Health Care Plans, kitchen notices and other locally agreed systems.

Relevant information will be communicated to all staff involved in food preparation, food service, mealtime supervision, educational visits, cooking activities and emergency response. Temporary, agency and supply staff will be made aware of any relevant dietary risks before assuming responsibility for children.

Volunteers, students, contractors and regular visitors who may be involved in food preparation, food service, cooking activities, celebrations, outings or supervision will receive allergy-safety information and instructions appropriate to their role before taking part. They must follow the setting's agreed controls and work under the direction of an appropriately trained member of staff where required.

Before meals and snacks are provided, staff must confirm that food and drink are suitable for each child and that any allergen, texture or cross-contamination risks have been addressed. Where a child has a known allergy, intolerance or medical condition affecting food, an individual Health Care Plan and supporting risk assessment must be in place. Staff working with the child must understand the child's triggers, potential symptoms and emergency procedures, and any prescribed medication must remain accessible at all times.

The nursery will take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of allergen exposure and will supervise children carefully to prevent the sharing of food, drinks, utensils or bottles. Consideration will also be given to allergens when planning cooking activities, celebrations, snack provision and sensory or messy play experiences. While every effort will be made to manage risk, parents should be aware that the nursery cannot guarantee a completely allergen-free environment and will therefore work closely with families to agree appropriate control measures where trace allergen risks exist.

Any allergy-related near miss will be recorded, investigated and reviewed. This includes, for example, incorrect food preparation, food or drink being presented to the wrong child, unintended allergen exposure that does not result in harm, unavailable or out-of-date medication, or a failure to follow a Health Care Plan or agreed control measure. The review will identify learning, required actions and any changes needed to risk assessments, procedures or staff training.

Significant allergy incidents, recurring concerns and trends identified through incident and near-miss reviews will be reported through the nursery's safeguarding, leadership and governance arrangements. Learning will be used to strengthen risk assessments, staff training, emergency preparedness and future policy reviews.

The nursery will take reasonable and proportionate steps to ensure that children with allergies are safe, included and able to participate fully in nursery life. This includes mealtimes, celebrations, cooking and sensory activities, clubs, outings and enrichment experiences. Control measures should avoid unnecessary isolation or exclusion and should be agreed with parents or carers and, where appropriate, relevant health professionals.

Emergency Medication and Spare Adrenaline Auto-Injectors

Where permitted and appropriate, the nursery will maintain spare emergency adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) in accordance with current government guidance and local procedures. Emergency medication will be stored securely, clearly identified and remain readily accessible at all times.

Systems will be in place to monitor stock levels, expiry dates and storage conditions. Staff responsible for emergency response must know where emergency medication is located and how to access it without delay. Arrangements will also be considered for outings, educational visits and activities taking place away from the nursery site.

Choking Incidents

If a child experiences a choking incident that requires intervention, such as back blows or other first aid, staff must record where and how the child choked, the food involved, the action taken and the outcome. Parents and carers must be informed. Records will be reviewed periodically by the Nursery Manager to identify trends or common features and to take action to reduce future risk.

Educational Visits and Off-Site Activities

When planning educational visits, outings or activities away from the nursery site, staff must take account of food safety, choking prevention and allergy management arrangements as part of the risk assessment process.

Consideration will be given to food provision, allergen exposure, access to emergency medication, staff competency, emergency contact arrangements and access to emergency services. Relevant Health Care Plans, risk assessments and prescribed medication must accompany the child where required. Parents and carers will be consulted where additional arrangements may be necessary to support the child's safety and inclusion.

The Role of Parents and Carers

Parents and carers play a vital role in helping the nursery keep children safe. They are responsible for providing accurate and up-to-date information regarding allergies, intolerances, dietary requirements, medical conditions and their child's stage of eating development. Parents must inform the nursery promptly of any changes to diagnoses, medication, emergency contacts or dietary advice.

Where a child has an allergy, intolerance or medical condition affecting food, parents will be required to work with the nursery to establish and regularly review an individual Health Care Plan. Any prescribed medication or specialist equipment must be provided in date, clearly labelled and available whenever the child attends. Ongoing communication between parents and staff is essential to ensure that food provided within the nursery, food brought from home and food-related activities can be managed safely and effectively.

Individual Health Care Plans

The nursery will work with parents and, where required, medical professionals to agree a clear plan for managing each child's special dietary requirements, allergies or intolerances. A risk assessment will be carried out when formulating the plan and stored with the Health Care Plan.

The Health Care Plan will include:

- Details of the child's special dietary requirements, allergies or intolerances and a clear list of foods which can and cannot be eaten.
- How meals, snacks and drinks will be provided, including whether existing menus will be adapted or whether food will be provided separately.
- How the nursery will manage food brought from home, food sharing, cross-contamination and ingredients in cooking, craft or messy play activities.
- The child's current developmental eating stage, food textures and any support needed with feeding.
- The action to take in an emergency, including symptoms to look for, names and dose of prescribed medication, administration procedure and staff trained to administer it.
- Review dates and arrangements for updating the plan when parental or medical advice changes.

Procedure for Dealing with an Allergic Reaction

In the event of a child suffering an allergic reaction, first aid will be administered in accordance with the child's Health Care Plan where one is in place. If no Health Care Plan is in place, staff will follow paediatric first aid training and seek urgent medical advice where required.

A member of staff will contact the child's parents or carers as soon as possible. If an adrenaline auto-injector is administered, symptoms become more serious, or the child becomes distressed or unwell, an ambulance will be called immediately. If parents or carers have not arrived by the time the ambulance arrives, a member of staff will accompany the child to hospital.

All allergic reactions, anaphylaxis incidents, medication administered and emergency actions must be recorded and reviewed by the Nursery Manager. The child's Health Care Plan and risk assessment must be reviewed before the child next attends where appropriate.

Hygiene and Food Handling

The nursery is committed to maintaining high standards of food hygiene and safety. Food must be stored, prepared, cooked and served in accordance with food safety legislation and local procedures. Staff are expected to follow appropriate handwashing, cleaning, storage and cross-contamination control measures at all times.

Children's eating environments, including tables, highchairs, utensils and feeding equipment, will be cleaned appropriately before and after use. Children will be supported to develop age-appropriate hygiene routines, including washing their hands before meals and after using the toilet. Food will be cooked thoroughly, cooled safely where required and served at a temperature suitable for young children.

Useful Resources

- DfE Help for Early Years Providers: Food safety - <https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/food-safety>
- DfE Allergy safety in schools statutory guidance (used as good-practice guidance for early years settings) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/allergy-safety-in-schools>
- NHS Food allergy - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-allergy/>
- NHS Anaphylaxis - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anaphylaxis/>
- Allergy UK - <https://www.allergyuk.org/>
- Food Standards Agency allergen guidance - <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>
- NHS Start for Life weaning guidance - <https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/baby/weaning/>

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