

Allergy Awareness Policy

This policy follows the authority provided in the Allergies School Policy Advisory Guide issued by the VIC Department of Education and Training and was written in collaboration with Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.

The Hazard – Allergies

Allergies occur when the immune system reacts to substances (allergens) in the environment, which are usually harmless.

Anaphylaxis is a severe, rapidly progressive allergic reaction that is potentially life-threatening. For details on how we manage the risk of anaphylaxis in our College refer to our Management of Students at Risk of Anaphylaxis policy.

Penola Catholic College's Policy

Penola Catholic College is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all our students and in particular to minimise the risk of allergen exposure. It is our policy:

- to provide, as far as practicable, a safe and supportive environment in which students at risk of severe allergic reactions can participate equally in all aspects of schooling. Further information relating to staff is included in our Occupational Health & Safety Program.
- to raise awareness about allergies and the College's allergy management and Management of Students at Risk of Anaphylaxis policy in the College community.
- to engage with parents/guardians of each student at risk of anaphylaxis when assessing risks and developing strategies to increase student safety.
- to ensure that staff have knowledge about allergies, anaphylaxis and the College's guidelines and procedures in responding to an allergic reaction including anaphylaxis.

Identification of Students at Risk

Parents/guardians are requested to notify the College of all medical conditions including allergies. Refer to our Medical Records (Student) policy.

Students who are identified as having had severe allergic reactions and are at risk of anaphylaxis are considered high risk and are managed through our Management of Students at Risk of Anaphylaxis policy.

Individual Health Care Plans are developed for these students and include:

- the student's medical status (has an allergy but not prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector or at risk of anaphylaxis and has been prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector)
- the student's ASCIA Action Plan (an emergency response plan)
- learning and support needs of the student
- medication prescribed for treating the student's medical condition
- emergency care information
- strategies to reduce the risk of anaphylaxis

For students who are showing signs of an allergic reaction for the first time, and do not otherwise have an individual ASCIA Action Plan, the College follows the procedures in our First Aid and Allergy Awareness policies.

If a teacher or other staff member administering first aid is required to use an adrenaline autoinjector for general use from the College first aid kit they should refer to the ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis for General Use (Orange) stored with the first aid kit for instructions on administering adrenaline.

Individuals with an allergy that have only ever had mild/moderate allergic reactions are at low risk of having an anaphylaxis, but there is still a risk. They are often not prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector but should have an ASCIA Action Plan for Allergic Reactions (Green).

Individuals that have had a previous severe allergic reaction/anaphylaxis to triggers (other than medications) and those deemed to be at high risk by their doctor or medical practitioner are prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector and given an ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis (Red).

Those with an ASCIA Action Plan for Allergic Reactions (Green) must still have strategies implemented to reduce risk as detailed on their Individual Health Care Plan.

Being Allergy Aware

Given the number of foods to which a student may be allergic, it is not possible to remove all allergens from any environment.

It is better for the College community to become aware of the risks associated with allergies and for the College to implement practical, age-appropriate strategies to minimise exposure to known allergens.

At Penola Catholic College we do not promote that we either 'ban allergens' such as egg and nuts or are 'nut-free, milk-free or egg-free' etc. Promoting the College as 'allergen-free' is not recommended for the following reasons:

- it is impractical to implement and enforce
- there is no evidence of effectiveness
- it does not encourage the development of strategies for avoidance in the wider College community, and
- it may encourage complacency about risk minimisation strategies (for teachers, students and parents/guardians) if a food is banned.

We consider that being 'allergy aware' is a more appropriate term.

Whilst we do not claim to be 'nut-free', minimising exposure to particular foods such as peanuts and tree nuts can reduce the level of risk. This can include removing nut spreads and products containing nuts from the College canteen but does not include removing products that 'may contain traces' of peanuts or tree nuts. Foods that have 'May contain...' statements can be consumed by students without a food allergy in the same location as students with a food allergy as long as they are not shared with students with a food allergy.

Common Allergens for Which Students May be at Risk of Allergy

Common foods causing allergies:

- egg
- milk

- peanuts
- tree nuts
- fish
- shellfish
- soy
- sesame
- wheat
- lupin.

Other triggers of allergic reactions include:

- insect bites and stings
- latex
- certain medications.

Signs and Symptoms of a Mild to Moderate Allergic Reaction

Signs and symptoms of a mild to moderate allergic reaction may include:

- swelling of lips, face or eyes
- hives or welts
- tingling mouth
- abdominal pain, vomiting (these are signs of anaphylaxis for insect bites and stings).

Raising Peer Awareness

Peer support and understanding is important for students with allergies (in particular those at risk of anaphylaxis).

Staff can raise awareness through class lessons, newsletter articles, brochures given to students, fact sheets or posters displayed in hallways, canteens and classrooms or in class lessons.

Class teachers can discuss the topic with students in class, with a few simple key messages:

- always take food allergies seriously – severe allergies are no joke
- don't share your food with friends who have food allergies or pressure them to eat food that they are allergic to
- not everyone has allergies – discuss common symptoms
- wash your hands before and after eating
- know what your friends are allergic to
- if a schoolmate becomes sick, get help immediately, and
- be respectful of a schoolmate's medical kit.

It is important to be aware that some parents/guardians may not wish their child's identity to be disclosed to the wider College community and this may also apply to the student themselves. It is therefore recommended that this be discussed with the student and their parents/guardians and written consent be obtained to display the student's name, photograph and relevant treatment details in canteens and/or other common areas.

Bullying Prevention

A student at risk of anaphylaxis may be at increased risk of bullying in the form of teasing, tricking a student into eating a particular food or threatening a student with the substance that they are allergic to, such as peanuts.

Penola Catholic College seeks to address this issue through raising peer awareness so that the students involved in such behaviour are aware of the seriousness of allergic reactions.

Any attempt to harm a student at risk of anaphylaxis with an allergen is treated as a serious and dangerous incident and treated accordingly under the College's Bullying Prevention and Intervention policy.

Raising General College Community Awareness

Penola Catholic College takes active steps to raise awareness about allergies and anaphylaxis in the College community so that parents/guardians of all students have an increased understanding.

These steps include providing information about our allergy awareness strategy to the broader College community through newsletters, fact sheets, posters and other publications.

Developing Strong Communications with Parents/Guardians of High-Risk Students

Parents/guardians of a student who is at risk of allergies (in particular anaphylaxis) may experience high levels of anxiety about sending their child to school.

It is important to encourage an open and cooperative relationship with parents/guardians so that they feel confident that appropriate risk minimisation strategies are in place, staff can recognise an allergic reaction and are able to administer an adrenaline autoinjector.

In addition to implementing risk minimisation strategies, the anxiety that parents/guardians and the student may feel can be considerably reduced by keeping them informed of class activities that may pose an increased risk well ahead of time, and the education, awareness and support from the College community.

Staff Responsibilities

All staff must be allergy aware and actively promote Penola Catholic College as an allergy aware College.

Signage

Allergy awareness signage is posted in the staffroom and in other locations around the College.

Implementation

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- College premises inspections (to identify wasp and bee hives)
- staff training and supervision
- maintenance of student medical records
- effective incident notification procedures

- effective communication procedures with the student's parents/guardians
- effective communication procedures with the broader College community.

Discipline for Breach of Policy

Where a staff member breaches this policy, Penola Catholic College may take disciplinary action.

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