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**CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CENTER OF THE HUDSON VALLEY
PROTECTING CHILDREN AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS**

www.ChildrensEnvironment.org

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Peanut Allergies: Keeping Your Children Safe

What is a Peanut Allergy?

Peanuts are one of the most common foods to cause an allergic reaction in children. The prevalence of peanut allergy has tripled in the last 10 years. If a child is diagnosed with a peanut allergy, it means that on ingestion of peanuts, IgE, an antibody in the body, binds to the peanut protein which causes the release of histamine and other chemicals that trigger an allergic reaction¹. A reaction to peanut can range from mild to fatal (anaphylaxis)². Reactions to peanut and tree nuts are the most common cause of death due to an allergy. There is a 35% chance that children who are allergic to peanuts are also allergic to tree nuts³.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction

Anaphylaxis is the most severe symptom of an allergic reaction, causing constriction of the airways that can be fatal. Anaphylaxis can also cause a drop in blood pressure².

Epinephrine is a medication that can reverse the severe symptoms of anaphylaxis. It is given as an injection into the thigh and is available as a self auto-injector that can be carried and used for any breathing difficulty or worsening symptoms of allergic reaction after accidental peanut ingestion.

More common symptoms include:

- Itchy rash (hives)
 - Swelling of the lips, eyes
 - Eczema
 - Gastrointestinal discomfort (nausea, diarrhea)
 - Tightening of the chest
 - Runny/itchy nose
 - Shortness of breath/wheezing
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How to reduce peanut exposure in the environment

There is no cure for peanut allergies¹. However, taking extra precaution can help prevent future allergic reactions due to peanut allergies:

- Depending on the severity of your child's allergy, the first prevention measure is to remove all peanut products from the home. This includes butters, pure nuts, trail mix, cereals with peanuts, etc.
- Read labels of all packaged products. The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) requires that all packaged food products sold in the United States that contain peanut must list "peanut" as an ingredient on the label. Peanuts are also referred to as other types of nuts: beer nuts, monkey nuts, and groundnuts are additional names for peanuts. Products often made with other types of nuts and oils such as soy, nut butter, or sunflower seed butter are manufactured on the same equipment as peanuts.
- Avoid Cross Contamination and Practice Good Hygiene. When children interact with numerous children, there is a possibility of cross contamination. Make sure that children and the family members are washing their hands regularly to avoid this. Parents must also remember to clean toys, counter tops, and clothing on a regular basis³. Casual contact with peanuts, such as touching peanuts or peanut butter residue is less likely to cause a severe reaction. Casual contact becomes a concern when the area that came into contact with peanut then comes into contact with the eyes, nose or mouth.¹
- Carry injectable epinephrine to treat a severe reaction in case of accidental ingestion

References

1. FARE, Food Allergy Research and Education. www.Foodallergy.org
2. Mayo Clinic Staff. Peanut Allergy. Mayo Clinic. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/peanut-allergy/DS00710>. Updated June 27th, 2012. Accessed March 2nd, 2013.
3. Young, Michael. Q&A:Peanut Allergies. PBS Kids. <http://www4.samford.edu/schools/pharmacy/dic/amaquickref07.pdf>. Updated April 9th, 2008. Accessed March 2nd, 2013.

