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Dear Parents/Guardian of In-coming, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students,

As we begin the new school year, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you about the IWA Allergy Policy. One student entering 1<sup>st</sup> grade, one student entering 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, one student entering 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and three students entering the 5<sup>th</sup> grade have been diagnosed with severe nut allergies. Their doctors have written letters indicating that the children should not be exposed to peanut butter, peanuts, nuts, or nut products.

To insure the safety of these children, BOTH 1<sup>st</sup> grade, BOTH 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, BOTH 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and BOTH 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms have been classified as “**nut free.**” Consequently, the following policy is in effect:

- Students may not bring peanuts, peanut butter, nuts or nut products into the classroom.
- No food or candy items will be permitted in the classroom if nuts or nut products are mentioned in the ingredients. If a snack or treat is sent into the classroom that contains any peanut butter, nuts, or nut products, it will be returned.

If you feel that your child must have products that contain peanut butter, nuts, or nut products in **their lunch ONLY** (perhaps for a medical reason), we will provide another room in which children who have brought a lunch containing these products can eat. **Again, in an effort to keep our students safe, please send peanut butter in your child’s lunch infrequently. If at all possible, I would ask that you refrain from sending in peanut butter, or nut products at all.**

Food allergies are very serious and are becoming more and more common. In fact, it is estimated that 3 million children in the U.S. have a food allergy! Even trace amounts of a food allergen can cause a reaction, the most serious of which is anaphylaxis. It is estimated that anaphylaxis caused by food results in 100 to 200 deaths each year. On the back of this letter is an article that appeared in the June 9, 2008 issue of *Newsweek* magazine. I hope that it will give you some insight into the severity of these allergies. **Please help us keep our students safe by reading labels carefully and by following our IWA policy.**

Thank you for your cooperation in this very serious matter of keeping our students safe from this life-threatening allergy. The best preventative measure we can take for these students is to follow strict avoidance of peanut butter, nuts, and all other nut products in their classrooms. Although not being allowed to eat peanuts or peanut products is a sacrifice for the children without allergies, we are teaching our children to have toleration and compassion for others.

Yours in Jesus, the Incarnate Word,

Mrs. Jan Cicerchi  
Principal

# A Plea for My Daughter

I don't want to inconvenience others over Lydia's allergies. But to not do so would be unthinkable.

By REBECCA FADEL KING

I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT WHAT I'LL SAY to the other parents on back-to-school night when my daughter enters first grade. That day is still months away, but I know I need to plan my words very carefully. I need to ask the other parents in the class to protect my daughter's life, and I know there is a good chance that some of them won't feel like participating.

In January my daughter was diagnosed with peanut and tree-nut allergies. Unlike most children diagnosed with severe food allergies, she had never exhibited a visible reaction to the food to which she's allergic. Her allergy was caught by chance, by an allergist who was supposed to be examining her for suspected asthma. Follow-up testing not only confirmed the allergies, but indicated that the peanut allergy is severe.

Over the course of a few days, our family's life changed. Lydia didn't object to not being able to eat nuts—she's never cared for them, and now I know why: they probably made her mouth or throat itch. It's the other adjustments, the ones we didn't expect, that are harder. The Chinese buffet restaurant where we like to take the kids for dinner? Off-limits, forevermore. Chinese food is often cooked in peanut oil, and the risk of cross-contamination at a buffet is uncontrollable. Ice-cream parlors, bakeries and doughnut shops are also forbidden. But the hardest thing so far has been watching a 5-year-old practice injecting her own thigh with epinephrine, the lifesaving medication she'll have to take, quickly, if she ever eats a trace of peanut by accident.

Lydia will never be able to go to a birthday party without bringing her own homemade cupcake. Every time she eats in a restaurant, she'll have to bring a card detailing her allergies and pray the chef takes her seriously. I don't want to think about when she's a teenager, too cool to even ask what's in food she's being offered.



PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION: *Our family life has changed*

For now, she can't go over to a friend's house without the friend's mother's being fully versed in Lydia's emergency protocol. It's enough work keeping kids entertained and fed; staving off anaphylactic shock may be more than some moms are willing to sign on for.

But Lydia did all these now forbidden things before she was diagnosed. She ate cookies made on equipment shared with nuts. She went on playdates and ate whatever snack was offered her. She sat across the table from a brother whose hands were

sticky with peanut butter. She never had a problem before; what's different now?

What's different is that now we know that there are antibodies lurking in her blood that will overreact if they come in contact with the smallest bit of nut. We're not being insanely cautious now; we were insanely lucky before. Peanut allergies are like mutual funds: past performance is no guarantee of future results. Lydia's last reaction to nuts may have been itchy lips. Her next could kill her.

Or not. She could break out in hives, or throw up. There's simply no way to know. In a way, that complicates matters. Although death by peanut is a real possibility, it is a relatively rare one. And people are reluctant to be inconvenienced to prevent an event they don't really believe will happen anyway. While scouring the Internet to learn about my daughter's condition, I came across a screed by a man furious at being denied peanuts on airline flights because of those whiny allergic people. Some readers commented on his selfishness. But several others cheered him on, suggesting ways he might "get back at" the whiners by surreptitiously exposing them to peanuts.

I've never met someone willing to express such malice to my face. But I have seen parents roll their eyes when another parent stands up at back-to-school night and begins, "My child has a nut allergy..." A few months ago, I myself groaned inwardly when I learned that the one classmate my daughter wanted at her birthday party was the one with a food allergy. I thought it odd that the girl's family ate quietly in a different area of the restaurant where we held the party. Now I know why: they wanted to be nearby with an

EpiPen, just in case. They didn't know me and didn't want to put me in the position of having to ensure their child's safety.

I don't want to ask that of other parents, either. I don't want to ask them to deny their children their favorite treats because my child can't be near peanuts. I don't want them rolling their eyes at me, or, God forbid, at my child. I hate to ask for their help, but I will, because I cannot keep my daughter safe by myself.

KING lives in Farmington Hills, Mich.

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