

## **Title: Back to School Means Extra Homework for Parents of Children With Food Allergies**

The topic of how schools should reopen this year has been on every parent's mind. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has said that school reopenings will likely vary by region and will look very different from state to state. In some school districts, the return to classes may mean social distancing and masks, while in other school districts, at-home learning may continue. Many school districts are also considering a hybrid approach with a combination of in-person instruction and at-home virtual learning.

For most parents, their top priority is keeping their children safe from COVID-19. For food allergy parents, reopening school comes with additional fear and anxiety. We know that local districts are trying their best to prioritize the safety of our children, but we don't know how the pandemic protocols will align with our children's food allergy accommodations. In-person instruction must allow for the safety and inclusion of our children affected by food allergies. All of us, including parents, school leadership and staff, play a vital role in protecting the health and safety of our children with chronic health conditions. It is imperative, especially in these times, that pandemic strategies include a comprehensive approach to managing food allergies. Without proper policies in place, social distancing strategies like eating lunch in the classroom can have severe unintended consequences for our loved ones. A single mistake, such as accidentally ingesting food residues left behind on a desk, can lead to a visit to the emergency room.

The [latest guidance for reopening schools amid COVID-19](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) retains the [earlier considerations](#) sought by FARE and allied organizations to acknowledge the needs of the 5.6 million children living with food allergies. We are very pleased that the CDC guidance continues to recognize the needs of food-allergic students, because school districts can use CDC resources to set their pandemic policies, although ultimately these federal suggestions are voluntary.

During this summer, as schools and school districts are determining how they will reopen and function, parents of children with food allergies should take time to create, in collaboration with their school, a written food allergy management plan. One type of plan is called a [504 Plan](#), which is available under a federal civil rights law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A 504 Plan is a type of plan written by the school in collaboration with a student and their family. The purpose of a 504 Plan is to address the individual needs of the child in providing a safe education. If you already have a 504 plan in place, now is the time to review that plan in partnership with your school and make sure those accommodations are aligned to protect your student's access to equal education while preserving a safe environment.

As parents, advocates and members of the food allergy community, we have fought so hard to get where we are today when it comes to guaranteeing the well-being of our children. We must keep our children healthy and safe by ensuring pandemic protocols do not create unwarranted issues in our schools. Safeguards can be put in place, with effective decontamination procedures that include strict handwashing guidelines and proper classroom cleaning and disinfection. We should also insist on food allergy education for principals, teachers, parents and students so that everyone in the school environment can recognize the symptoms of an allergic reaction and know what to do to save a life.

As the over 130,000 schools across the country consider their options under these difficult circumstances, let's join together in contacting our mayors, school district leadership, school

administrators and principals. By speaking on behalf of our 5.6 million children living with food allergies, we can help your local school district make the right decisions for all children.