

How to Make Valentine's Day Fun for Everyone at School



Food allergy is a common medical condition. An estimated 5.8% of children, about 4 million K-12 students, have a diagnosed food allergy. This is an average of 2 students in every American classroom¹. Allergic reactions are on the rise in children, and these events are almost always avoidable².

Valentine's Day and other school celebrations may pose a risk and cause anxiety, stress, and social isolation for students with food allergies³. FARE offers these food allergy facts and tips to ensure that all students can enjoy Valentine's Day together.

Fast Facts:

- 1 in 4 life-threatening food allergy reactions in school settings happen in people without diagnosed food allergies.
- 1 in 13 children in the United States has food allergy, which can cause life-threatening allergic reactions⁴.
- In a 2-year period, about 2 out of every 5 students with food allergies have at least one allergic reaction while attending school or related activities.
- About 3 in 4 students with food allergy accidentally ingest food allergens at some point⁶.
- Approximately 8 in 10 food allergy reactions in schools happen in the classroom (83%), while about 15% happen in the cafeteria⁵.
- About 1 in 3 children have experienced bullying, teasing, or harassment about their food allergies⁷.
- To help prevent food allergen exposure, it is important to discourage both eating in the classroom and the use of food as student incentives or as part of classroom celebrations.

To create food-free FUN on Valentine's Day, try these tips:

- Create awareness, fostering conversations about food allergy ahead of time. Talk with your students and colleagues about the importance of having a celebration where no one is left out.
- Check all labels. Valentine's Day is a great opportunity to teach adults and children in class about food labels and how to read them. Reemphasize to children that sweets shouldn't be eaten unless a trusted adult has read the label and said it is OK.
- If giving out treats to students, consider utilizing non-food treats and encourage students to do the same.
- In case of emergency, schools should ensure that a trained staff member who is legally able to administer epinephrine is present in every building with students. To reduce bullying and create a safer environment for food allergic students, schools should include food allergy education in their programming. Utilize resources offered by FARE to learn about food allergies, recognize the symptoms of an allergic reaction, and minimize allergen exposure in the classroom. Also available is the publication, [Food Allergy Management in Schools \(FAMS\): Expert Recommendations for K-12](#).



Ideas for Non-Food Treats

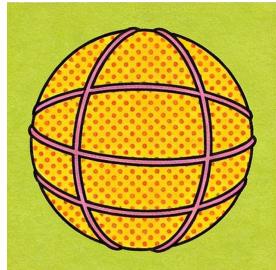
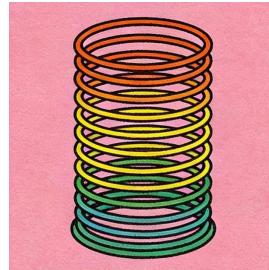
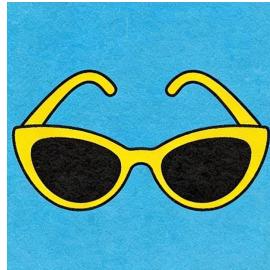
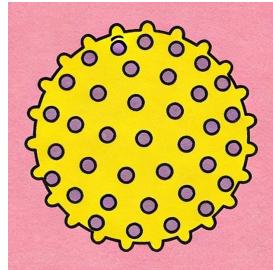
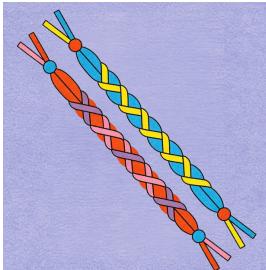
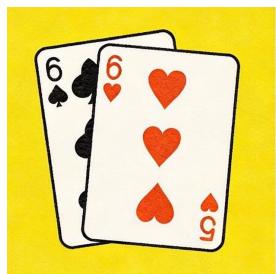


Alternatives to Food

The CDC and FARE recommend avoiding the use of known allergens in classroom activities, such as arts and crafts, counting, science projects, parties and holiday celebrations. Using non-food items for rewards or incentives helps create a healthy, supportive environment for all students.

- Friendship bracelets
- Bouncy balls
- Activity or coloring books
- Stickers
- Whistles, kazoos, or noisemakers
- Glow sticks
- Slinkies
- Playing cards
- Stencils
- Hair accessories
- Sunglasses
- Bubbles
- Pencils, pens, or markers
- Erasers or pencil toppers
- Finger puppets or novelty toys
- Jigsaw puzzle
- Plush toys
- Rubber ducks
- Fidget toys
- Keyrings
- Collectible cards

Some common classroom materials contain hidden allergens!
For example, finger paints may contain milk and some crayons contain soy.



¹ Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE). Estimated Food Allergy Population by State and Age Group – 2023. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/estimated-food-allergy-population-state-pdf>

² Foong RX, Patel NB, Turner P, Roberts GC, Fox AT. Preventing food allergy fatalities. Arch Dis Child. 2023;108(9):698-702. doi:10.1136/archdischild-2022-324911

³ Patel N, Herbert L, Green TD. The emotional, social, and financial burden of food allergies on children and their families. Allergy Asthma Proc. 2017;38(2):88-91. doi:10.2500/aap.2017.38.4028

⁴ White MV, Hogue SL, Odom D, et al. Anaphylaxis in Schools: Results of the EPIPEN4SCHOOLS Survey Combined Analysis. Pediatr Allergy Immunol Pulmonol. 2016;29(3):149-154. doi:10.1089/ped.2016.0675

⁵ Nowak-Wegrzyn A, Conover-Walker MK, Wood RA. Food-allergic reactions in schools and preschools. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2001;155(7):790-795. doi:10.1001/archpedi.155.7.790

⁶ Hicks A, Palmer C, Bauer M, Venter C. Accidental ingestions to known allergens by food allergic children and adolescents. Pediatr Allergy Immunol. 2021;32(8):1718-1729. doi:10.1111/pai.13573

⁷ Cooke F, Ramos A, Herbert L. Food Allergy-Related Bullying Among Children and Adolescents. J Pediatr Psychol. 2022;47(3):318-326. doi:10.1093/jpepsy/jsab099

