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Be A Pal
Protect. Ask. Learn.



Food Allergy Awareness: High School

How can you support someone with food allergies?

Facilitator Guide

Teachers, Nurses, School Administrators, Parents, Volunteers,
Student Leaders

SECTION — BEFORE YOU BEGIN

About This Guide

This guide walks any facilitator — a classroom teacher, school nurse, parent volunteer, or student leader — through the Be a PAL: Food Allergy Awareness and Education presentation for high school students. It pairs every slide with a plain-language description, ready-to-use scripting, and discussion questions that spark real conversation.

You do not need a medical background to lead this lesson. Read the slide, say it in your own words (or use the script as-is), and ask the discussion question before clicking to the answer.

Grade Level	High school (recommended grades 9th through 12th)
Time Needed	35–45 minutes, including discussion
Group Size	Whole class, small group, or one-on-one
Materials	The Be-A-PAL slide deck and a way to display it (projector, smartboard, or tablet). No handouts are required. Optional activities provided at the end of this guide.
Slide Count	28 slides, organized into short sections

Tips for Every Kind of Facilitator

Teacher	Fold this into a health class, advisory period, or homeroom block.
School Nurse	Consider epinephrine demonstrations if permitted in your school.
Parent Volunteer	You do not need to be an expert. The script is written for you to read almost word-for-word.
Student Leader	Keep it casual and peer-to-peer. Skip the citations slide (24), and feel free to shorten the statistics on slide 4 to just the classroom fact: “that’s two students in every classroom.”

How to Read This Guide

Each section below mirrors the deck. The “Slide” column tells you where you are, “On the Screen” describes what the group sees, “Say This / Do This” gives you scripting you can read aloud or paraphrase, and “Spark Conversation” gives you a question to ask before moving on. Quoted lines are suggestions, not a mandatory script. Have fun with it and thank you for spreading awareness and education on food allergies.

SECTION 1 — WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

Slide	On the Screen	Say This / Do This	Spark Conversation
1	Title slide: Be a PAL logo, “Protect. Ask. Learn.” and the guiding question.	<i>Welcome the group. Say: “Today we’re going to talk about food allergies and how you can support classmates and friends who live with them — being a PAL who Protects, Asks, and Learns.”</i>	Before we start: what comes to mind when you hear ‘food allergy’? Have you ever known someone with one?
2	Student video.	<i>“Let’s hear directly from a student about what it’s really like to live with food allergies.” (Play the video.)</i>	What stood out to you from the video? What is one thing you learned about living with a food allergy?
3	What is a Food Allergy?		You can gauge the students’ baseline knowledge of what a food allergy is.
4	Definition of a food allergy; why even a tiny bite matters; rising prevalence.	<i>“A food allergy is when your body’s immune system mistakes a harmless food protein for a threat and overreacts — that response is an allergic reaction.”</i> <i>“A food allergy can start at any age, even with a food you’ve eaten safely before.”</i> <i>“Reactions can be life-threatening, and even a trace amount of the food can trigger a serious reaction.”</i> <i>“Food allergies among kids have been rising for decades — up 50% between 1997 and 2011, and up another 50% between 2007 and 2021.”</i>	Why do you think food allergy rates have been rising? Has anyone in your life been diagnosed with a new food allergy? <i>Possible to answer: “We do not know exactly why food allergies are becoming more common, but scientists believe it is likely due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Changes in our modern environment, such as differences in diet, the microbes we are exposed to, and how early babies are introduced to allergenic foods, may affect how the immune system develops. It is an active area of research, and there is no single cause.”</i>
5	How many people have food allergies?		You can ask students to estimate the number of people in the United States

			that have a food allergy. You can give them perspective by informing them that the U.S. population (2026) is estimated to be over 340 million.
6	33 million Americans have food allergies — 10.8% of adults, 7.6% of kids; that is about two students per classroom.	<i>“About 33 million Americans have food allergies. Food allergies are serious, and they affect students just like you — that is about two students in every classroom in the country.”</i>	You can put this in perspective by letting students know that if you put all the people with food allergy into one state, it would be greater than the population of Texas!
7	What are the most common food allergens?		You can ask students to guess what the top 9 food allergens in the United States are before advancing to the next slide.
8	The nine most common food allergens, numbered with icons: milk, egg, peanut, tree nut, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish, sesame.	<i>“More than 170 foods have caused allergic reactions, but nine foods cause most food allergies in the U.S.: milk, egg, peanut, tree nut, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish, and sesame. Remember, someone can be allergic to almost anything.”</i>	Why does it matter to know them, even if you are not allergic to anything yourself? Possible answer: “It is important to know the Top 9 food allergens because they are required by law to be on packaged food labels.”

SECTION 2 — WHY UNDERSTANDING FOOD ALLERGY MATTERS

Slide	On the Screen	Say This / Do This	Spark Conversation
9	Section divider.	<i>"Now that we've covered what a food allergy is, let's talk about why this matters to you and your day-to-day life at school."</i>	
10	The high school experience: student clubs, events and fundraisers, classrooms and art projects, sports, school trips, college visits, celebrations, proms, cafeterias.	<i>"Food shows up everywhere in the high school experience — clubs, fundraisers, classroom projects, sports, school trips, prom, and of course the cafeteria. For someone with a food allergy, each of these can take extra planning."</i>	Raise your hand if food is part of an activity you participate in every week. Which would be trickiest to navigate with a food allergy?
11	Discussion prompt: What is it like for someone with a food allergy?	<i>"Let's pause here. Think of places where food is a central focus and could be tricky for someone with a food allergy."</i>	Name some activities that could be hard for someone with a food allergy. What would you do differently if you had to think about that every day?
12	Photo collage of everyday high school moments — riding the bus, eating together, group projects, travel, birthday celebrations.	<i>"These are just a few of the everyday moments where a food allergy can add extra stress — grabbing food between classes, group projects with snacks, class trips, celebrations."</i>	Which of these pictures feels most familiar to you? What is one thing that would help a friend feel safer in that moment?

SECTION 3 — BE ALERT: RECOGNIZING A REACTION

Slide	On the Screen	Say This / Do This	Spark Conversation
13	Section divider: How to Support Friends with Food Allergy.	<i>“So now let's get practical — here's how you can actually support a friend with a food allergy.”</i>	Key Takeaway: <i>“While it's not your job to recognize or treat a reaction, knowing the basics can make you a more informed and supportive friend”</i>
14	Be Alert: Know the signs and symptoms; reactions vary by person and by time. Mild symptoms vs. severe symptoms.	<i>“The first step to being a PAL is to be alert. A reaction can happen anytime and can look different from person to person — even the same person might react differently than before. Mild symptoms include a few hives, a runny nose, or itchy skin and lips. Severe symptoms include dizziness, shortness of breath, wheezing or trouble breathing, widespread hives, and excessive vomiting.”</i>	Why is it important to know both the mild and the severe symptoms, not just the serious ones? Possible answer: “It is important to know all symptoms because reactions are unpredictable and even mild symptoms can evolve into a more serious reaction”
15	Common signs and symptoms by body system: mouth, emotional, cardiovascular, skin, abdomen.	<i>“A reaction can show up almost anywhere in the body. In the mouth: itchiness, a dry cough, or trouble swallowing. Emotionally: a sudden mood change or a sense that something is wrong. In the cardiovascular system: a drop in blood pressure, feeling faint or confused, or a weak pulse. On the skin: hives, flushing, redness, or a bluish tint. In the abdomen: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or stomach pain. Not every reaction includes all of these, but this gives you a sense of what to look for.”</i>	If a friend said their mouth felt ‘itchy’ or they had a ‘weird feeling’ after they ate, what would you ask them? Why might someone downplay how they are feeling?

SECTION 4 — RESPONDING TO A SEVERE REACTION

Slide	On the Screen	Say This / Do This	Spark Conversation
16	What Should You Do if Someone Is Having an Allergic Reaction?		Ask the students what they would do if someone around them was having a reaction. Would they feel comfortable recognizing that someone was having a food allergy reaction?
17	How to Help someone having a severe reaction (anaphylaxis): five numbered steps, plus an antihistamine warning.	<i>"If you think someone is having a severe reaction, here is what to do. One: Give epinephrine. (You are never expected to administer epinephrine to someone else as a student, but you can help your friend get their epinephrine) Get a teacher or adult right away — every second matters, and it can save a life. Epinephrine is the only medicine that can help stop a severe allergic reaction. Two: Call 911. Three: Don't leave your friend alone. Four: If symptoms do not improve in 5 to 10 minutes, your friend may need a second dose of epinephrine. Five: Make sure the person gets to a hospital, even if they start to feel better — symptoms can return hours later."</i> <i>"Important: antihistamines like Benadryl or Zyrtec will NOT stop a reaction. Only epinephrine can."</i>	Why is it important to call 911 even after epinephrine has already been given? Which adults at your school would you go to first in an emergency?
18	Using an epinephrine autoinjector — "blue to the sky, orange to the thigh," shown step by step.	<i>"If your school allows it, here is how an epinephrine autoinjector works. Remember the phrase: 'blue to the sky, orange to the thigh.' Pull off the blue safety cap, then press the orange tip firmly against the outer thigh until you hear it click, and hold it in place for a few seconds."</i>	Does your school nurse or health office have a training video or demo device you could practice with?
19	Using a different type of an autoinjector, Auvi-Q	<i>Here is a look at another autoinjector called Auvi-Q. For this autoinjector, you remove the autoinjector from the case, remove the red cap, and place the black end on the outer thigh, press firmly, and hold in place for 2 seconds.</i>	
20	Using nasal epinephrine spray.	<i>"Another option for epinephrine is a nasal spray. It is given by spraying it into one nostril. If the symptoms do not resolve after 5 minutes, the second dose is given in the same nostril"</i>	Why does it help to know all the options exist, even if a friend only uses one?

SECTION 5 — BEING A GOOD FOOD ALLERGY FRIEND

Slide	On the Screen	Say This / Do This	Spark Conversation
21	How Can You Be a PAL to Someone with a Food Allergy?		You are never expected to be able to give medication to a friend or another student. It is great to learn about and understand how to do this, but what are ways that a high school student can always be a PAL to someone with a food allergy?
22	Be Open: Encourage disclosure, understand hesitation, normalize the conversation, and be an extra set of eyes.	<i>“Being a PAL also means being open. Encourage friends to share if they have a food allergy but understand that some people feel shy or hesitant to bring it up — it is personal. You can help normalize that conversation, and just being an extra set of eyes for a friend can make a big difference.”</i>	Why might someone hesitate to tell people about their food allergy? What is one way you could make it easier for a friend to open up?
23	Be Kind: A list of considerate habits — clean shared spaces, allergy-safe activities, prevent cross-contact, wash hands, stand up against teasing, ask “how can I help?”	<i>“Being kind looks like a lot of small habits: keeping shared spaces clean, choosing activities that are not centered around food, cleaning up after you eat to prevent cross-contact, and washing your hands with soap and water. If someone is mocking or teasing a friend about their allergy, stand up for them. And if you are sharing a meal out together, start the conversation — ask, ‘How can I help?’ or ‘Is there somewhere else you’d rather eat to make this easier?’”</i>	Of all these ideas, which feels easiest to start doing this week? Which is the hardest?
24	Be Willing to Ask: Where do they keep epinephrine, how do you use it, what do symptoms feel like, and how do you read labels?	<i>“If your friend is comfortable talking about their food allergy, ask questions: where do they keep their epinephrine? Can they show you how to use it? What do their symptoms usually feel like? If you are ever unsure whether a food is safe, ask your friend or a trusted adult to help read the label. Food allergies can be scary and hard to manage, but it gets easier with a little help from friends.”</i>	Why would asking these questions ahead of time — not during an emergency — make a real difference?
25	Be Willing to Learn: Read labels, recognize symptoms, learn to use epinephrine, learn how to help a friend feel safe.	<i>“Being a good food allergy friend means being willing to learn how to read a food label, how to recognize the signs of a reaction, how to use epinephrine if you’re ever asked to help, and how to support your friend so they feel safe and comfortable around food.”</i>	What is one thing you did not know before today and want to remember?

SECTION 6 — WRAPPING UP

Slide 26/27 — Thank You and Resources

Close by thanking the group for their time and attention. Remind them that being a PAL — someone who Protects, Asks, and Learns — makes a real difference for a friend with a food allergy. If you are interested in additional resources, visit FoodAllergy.org.

Quick Recap: Three Ways to Be a PAL

- Protect — be alert to symptoms, keep shared spaces and activities allergy-safe, and know where a friend's epinephrine is kept.
- Ask — check in with a friend about their allergy, their symptoms, and how you can help, instead of guessing.
- Learn — recognize the signs of a reaction, learn how to use epinephrine, and get help immediately if you see them.

Optional Wrap-Up Questions

- What is one thing you are going to do differently after today's lesson?
- Who is someone you could check in with this week to be a good PAL?

Slide 28 — Citations

This slide lists the sources behind the presentation's statistics. It's meant as a facilitator reference — most groups will not need it read aloud (see the Student Leader tip on page 1 for skipping it with peer audiences).

- Gupta RS, Warren CM, Smith BM, et al. The public health impact of parent-reported childhood food allergies in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2018;142(6).
- Bajaj KM, et al. Students report lack of food allergy awareness on college campuses. Presented at: AAAAI Annual Meeting; Feb. 24–27, 2023; San Antonio.
- Sicherer SH, Wood RA, TePas E (2024). Food allergy in college and university students: Overview and management. *UpToDate*.
- Homayoun, A. (2024, March 15). A New College Lesson Plan for Improving Executive Functioning. *Inside Higher Ed*.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2024, April 30). Higher Education: Education Could Improve Information on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. GAO-24-105614.
- Food Allergy Research & Education. (2024, April). FARE Food Allergy Facts and Statistics.

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Optional Activities

- Label-reading challenge: Bring in a few food packages and practice spotting the nine major allergens.
- Epinephrine trainer demo (if available through your school nurse).
- Food allergy games and activities: foodallergy.org/resources/school-activities