

# Allergy Awareness Policy



## The Hazard - Allergies

Allergies occur when the immune system reacts to substances (allergens) in the environment, which are usually harmless. Examples include proteins, pollens, dust mites and insect venoms.

Anaphylaxis is a severe, rapidly progressive allergic reaction that is potentially life threatening. For details on how we manage anaphylaxis in our school refer to our **Anaphylactic Shock Management Policy**.

## St Catherine's Policy

St Catherine's is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all our students and in particular to minimise the risk of allergen exposure. It is our policy:

- To provide, as far as practicable, a safe and supportive environment in which students at risk of allergies can participate equally in all aspects of the student's schooling;
- To raise awareness about allergies and the school's allergy management and **Anaphylactic Shock Management Policy** in the school community;
- To engage with parents/carers of each student at risk of allergies when assessing risks and developing risk minimisation strategies for the student; and
- To ensure that staff have knowledge about allergies, anaphylaxis and the school's guidelines and procedures in responding to an anaphylactic reaction.

## Safe Work Practices

St Catherine's has developed the following work practices and procedures to increase allergy awareness:

### 1. Identification of Students at Risk

Parents/carers are requested to notify the school of all medical conditions including allergies. **Refer to our Medical Records (Student) Policy.**

Students who are identified as suffering from severe allergies that may cause anaphylactic shock are considered high risk and are managed through our **Anaphylactic Shock Management Policy**.

### 2. Being Allergy Aware

Given the number of foods to which a student may be allergic to, it is not possible to remove all allergens.

It is better for the St Catherine's community to become aware of the risks associated with allergies and for the school to implement practical, age appropriate strategies to minimise exposure to known allergens.

At St Catherine's we do not promote that we either 'ban nuts' or are 'nut-free'. Promoting a school as 'nut-free' is not recommended for the following reasons:

- It is impractical to implement and enforce;
- There is no evidence of effectiveness;
- It does not encourage the development of strategies for avoidance in the wider school community; and

- It may encourage complacency about risk minimisation strategies (for teachers, students and parents/carers) if a food is banned.

We consider that being 'allergy aware' is a more appropriate term.

Whilst we do not claim to be 'nut-free', minimising exposure to particular foods such as peanuts and tree nuts can reduce the level of risk. This can include removing nut spreads and products containing nuts from the school canteen, but does not include removing products that 'may contain traces' of peanuts or tree nuts.

We may also choose to request that parents/carers of classmates of a student do not include nut spreads in sandwiches or products containing nuts in their lunch box.

### 3. **Raising Peer Awareness**

Peer support and understanding is important for the student at risk of allergies (in particular anaphylaxis).

Staff can raise awareness through fact sheets or posters displayed in hallways, canteens and classrooms or in class lessons.

Class teachers can discuss the topic with students in class, with a few simple key messages:

- Always take food allergies seriously – severe allergies are no joke;
- Don't share your food with friends who have food allergies or pressure them to eat food that they are allergic to;
- Not everyone has allergies – discuss common symptoms;
- Wash your hands before and after eating;
- Know what your friends are allergic to;
- If a schoolmate becomes sick, get help immediately; and
- Be respectful of a school mate's medical kit.

It is important to be aware that some parents/carers may not wish their child's identity be disclosed to the wider school community. This may also apply to the student themselves. It is therefore recommended that this be discussed with the student and their parents/carers and written consent be obtained to display the student's name, photograph and relevant treatment details in staff areas, canteens and/or other common areas.

### 4. **Bullying Prevention**

A student at risk of allergies can have an increased risk of bullying in the form of teasing, tricking a student into eating a particular food or threatening a student with the substance that they are allergic to, such as peanuts.

St Catherine's seeks to address this issue through raising peer awareness so that the students involved in such behaviour are aware of the seriousness of allergic reactions.

Any attempt to harm a student at risk of anaphylaxis with an allergen is treated as a serious and dangerous incident and treated accordingly under the school's **Bullying Policy**.

### 5. **Raising General School Community Awareness**

St Catherine's takes active steps to raise awareness about allergies and anaphylaxis in the school community so that parents/carers of all students have an increased understanding.

These steps include providing information about our allergy awareness strategy to the broader school community through newsletters, fact sheets, posters and other publications.

#### **Developing Strong Communications with Parents/Carers of High Risk Students**

Parents/carers of a student who is at risk of allergies (in particular anaphylaxis) may experience high levels of anxiety about sending their child to school.

It is important to encourage an open and cooperative relationship with parents/carers so that they feel confident that appropriate risk minimisation strategies are in place.

In addition to implementing risk minimisation strategies, the anxiety that parents/carers and the student may feel can be considerably reduced by keeping them informed of the increased education, awareness and support from the school community.

### **Employees' Responsibility**

All employees must be allergy aware and actively promote St Catherine's as an allergy aware school.

### **Signage**

Allergy awareness signage is posted in the staffroom and in other locations around the school.

### **Implementation**

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- St Catherine's premises inspections (to identify wasp and bee hives);
- Staff training and supervision;
- Maintenance of medical records;
- Effective incident notification procedures;
- Effective communication procedures with the student's parents/carers; and
- Effective communication procedures with the broader school community.

### **Discipline for Breach of Policy**

Where a staff member breaches this policy St Catherine's may take disciplinary action.

### **Related Policies**

- *Accident Management*
- *Anaphylactic Shock Management Policy*
- *Bites & Stings Policy*
- *Bullying Prevention & Intervention Policy*
- *Emergency Management Response*
- *Excursions Policy*
- *First Aid Policy*
- *Illness & Disease Policy*
- *Medical Records (Student) Policy*
- *Medication Administration Policy*

**Implementation Date:** October 2016

**Review Date:** September 2021