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Hosting a Food Allergic Child? Tips & Advice From Founder of AllergyEats, Father of Three Food Allergic Children

Food Allergy Advocate Advises: Communicate, Prepare & Don't Panic

BOSTON, MA (July 6, 2011) – Hosting a child with food allergies can be quite intimidating for a parent who is unfamiliar with this medical condition. Contact with an offending allergen can cause physical reactions in a food allergic child, ranging from minor stomachaches and rashes to, in more extreme cases, life-threatening anaphylactic shock. Therefore, parents unfamiliar with food allergies are often – understandably – anxious about hosting a play date or other activity. But Paul Antico, founder of AllergyEats (www.AllergyEats.com), says hosting a food allergic child shouldn't be nerve-wracking. With proper communication, education and simple preparation, parents can feel confident that their upcoming play dates will be safe and successful.

“Food-allergic children shouldn't miss out on the fun of socializing with their friends, and parents shouldn't be intimidated about hosting a food-allergic child. As the host, you'll need to take the child's food allergies seriously, prepare accordingly and understand what to do in case of emergency, but there's absolutely no need to panic,” said Antico, who is also a food allergy advocate and father of three food allergic children. “With proper preparation, the food allergic child will be fine in your care.”

Antico's recommendations include:

- **Communicate openly.** This is the most obvious and important step. Ask the child's parents questions about the food allergies, which foods the child should avoid, how to recognize signs of an allergic reaction and what to do in case of emergency. Some parents might prefer sending their own safe food with the child. In the case of a severe food allergy, the parents should provide the child's Epi-Pen – a simple-to-use, automatic injection device – with clear instructions on how to use it in an emergency. And be sure to get emergency contact information.
- **Eliminate potential dangers before the play date begins.** When a food-allergic child is visiting your house, keep offending foods away. Proactively put out safe snacks for the kids. Before the play date begins, thoroughly clean any surfaces the children might touch. You don't want a child with a peanut allergy to inadvertently touch (or eat) the peanut butter remnants from an earlier meal.
- **Be careful serving food.** Carefully read ingredient labels to be sure foods don't contain an allergen. Be aware that some allergy triggers can have more than

one name, so communicate with the child's parents to ensure you understand exactly what the child can – and cannot – eat. Realize that trigger foods can show up in unexpected places so read every label thoroughly.

- **Prevent cross-contamination.** Don't allow a food-allergic child's food to touch someone else's. (e.g. don't let the icing from a birthday cupcake touch the "special" cupcake brought by an egg allergic child). And be sure to use clean dishes, cutting boards, pans and utensils if you're preparing meals and snacks for the food allergic child.
- **Find restaurants that accommodate food allergies.** Plan ahead before taking the food allergic child out to eat, and ask the child's parents which restaurants are most accommodating. The child's parents may provide you with a Chef Card, outlining the child's trigger foods and clearly explaining to the restaurant's staff how the child's meal should be prepared. You or the child's parents should also consider using AllergyEats (www.AllergyEats.com), the biggest and fastest growing source for finding allergy-friendly restaurants, to find accommodating restaurants in your area. AllergyEats provides valuable peer-based feedback that will help you determine which restaurants to consider and which to avoid.
- **Understand emergency procedures.** Get very clear instructions about how to identify the child's allergic reaction and what to do in an emergency. Every child – and every reaction – is different. Some allergic reactions may be severe and require an Epi-Pen injection and a trip to the ER. Many reactions are milder, requiring Benadryl or, in some cases, no medicine at all. Be sure to have the child's medicine, instructions and emergency contact information with you at all times.
- **Don't panic!** The effects of a food-allergic child coming into contact with a trigger food can be very serious, but with proper precaution, these events are rare. And remember that you're prepared with an emergency "backup plan" if exposure does occur.

"It's normal to feel some anxiety about hosting a food-allergic child if you're not familiar with food allergy protocols, but there's no need to be intimidated. With proper communication, simple precautionary measures and an emergency action plan, you can feel comfortable that the child will be fine in your care," Antico continued. "And the more you host a food-allergic child, the easier it will be, as your confidence and comfort level will continue to grow."

About AllergyEats

AllergyEats, a free, user-friendly website, provides valuable peer-based feedback about how well (or poorly) restaurants accommodate the needs of food-allergic customers. The peer ratings and feedback allow food-allergic and gluten-intolerant diners to quickly

and easily find restaurants that will accommodate their specific dietary requirements – and avoid the ones that won't.

AllergyEats lists more than 600,000 restaurants nationwide, which food-allergic diners can rate. The site also offers information on restaurants' menus (including gluten-free menus), allergen lists, nutrition information, certifications, web links, directions and more. AllergyEats has been endorsed by highly-respected food, health and allergy organizations and individuals, including the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Gluten Intolerance Group, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Chef Ming Tsai and more.

For more information, please visit www.AllergyEats.com.

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