

Fonterra's Milk in Schools Programme:

Guidelines for children with cow's milk allergy

Allergy New Zealand distributed 'Allergy and Anaphylaxis Guidelines for Early Childhood Services and Schools' to all schools in November 2011. Further copies are available from Allergy New Zealand and a PDF version can be downloaded from the Allergy New Zealand website: www.allergy.org.nz

The guidelines in relation to the Milk in Schools Programme should be read in conjunction with the 'Allergy & Anaphylaxis Guidelines'.

Milk is an important source of nutrition for children however a small number, possibly up to 5% (one in twenty) are allergic to milk and therefore all dairy food. Most children will outgrow cow's milk allergy but this is taking longer in some and could extend into adolescence. Therefore at primary school level, it is possible there will be on average at least one milk-allergic child per classroom. Some of these children may have multiple food allergies; combined allergies to milk, eggs and peanuts are becoming more prevalent in young children.

Allergic reactions to milk are mostly mild to moderate but in some cases can be life-threatening (anaphylaxis). The main risk for children is ingesting milk. Contact reactions occur when milk touches the skin e.g. if milk is splashed on the skin, or if someone with milk on their hands then touches a child with milk allergy. Reactions (hives, urticaria) are usually localised but if the milk-allergic child gets milk on their hands then rubs their eyes, this can cause significant swelling, redness and itchiness of the eyes. However if the child put their fingers in their mouth, this could cause a more severe reaction through ingestion of the allergen. The reaction could be more generalised, including vomiting, and is regarded as anaphylaxis if there are signs that breathing or blood pressure is affected (refer the Allergy & Anaphylaxis Guidelines for more details).

Children with food allergies including milk allergy should have written allergy or anaphylaxis action plans filled in and signed by their doctor; and copies provided to the school. Public Health Nurses can assist schools and families with getting plans in place, and also with training and education on anaphylaxis, which is a medical emergency and needs prompt injection of adrenaline.

It is important to prevent any child with cow's milk allergy from coming into contact with milk; and also to be prepared if a child does have a reaction through accidental exposure. It is noted that the Fonterra Milk for Schools programme includes:

- 250ml milk in single cartons with straw attached
- Drinking Guide and Recycling Guide for children including instructions for collecting the pack, straw and straw wrapper and disposal of these into a recycling bin (also provided by Fonterra to schools).

However there are some more specific things for schools to think about if they have children present with milk allergy e.g.

- Particularly for younger children, it may be best not to have milk drunk in the classroom if there is a child with milk allergy, so is there another location in the school that can be used?
- All children should be required to wash their hands after drinking the milk – and possibly faces as well
- If children don't drink their milk all at once any left-overs should be poured down a sink and the box discarded as per the guidelines. The sink will need to be rinsed thoroughly once all the milk has been discarded
- If the location used for children to drink their milk and dispose of the cartons is used for other general activities which might include milk-allergic children, then it will need surfaces etc wiped down; and floors cleaned if any milk has been spilt
- Supervision and other activities should be set up for children with milk-allergies while their classmates are drinking milk, so they don't feel left out. It may be possible for parents to supply another type of drink for their child to have while the class is drinking the milk
- While it is very unlikely a child will react to milk the first time they drink it through the Fonterra programme (i.e. have a previously undiagnosed milk allergy), it is possible, so staff should be aware of this.

Reporting reactions

It is recommended:

- i) Schools document the policies and procedures they have in place at the outset. These can be developed with advice and support from the Public Health Nurse associated with each school
- ii) Included in this should be a policy on and procedure for recording and reporting incidents including allergic reactions, the measures taken to treat the reaction and advise parents/caregivers, and a debrief to determine what, if any, steps could be taken to improve the safety of the child concerned.
- iii) Details should be provided to the Public Health Nurse.

Schools will know the contact details for their Public Health Nurse.

***Refer to Allergy New Zealand's website for more information about allergies:
www.allergy.org.nz or contact us on (09) 623 3912 or 0800 34 0800***