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Allergy New Zealand – PSA re: Peter Rabbit Allergy Controversy

Media Release

Ahead of the “Peter Rabbit” film release next month, Allergy New Zealand is calling on Sony Pictures to issue a Public Service Announcement over concerns about the negative representation of food allergies.

The film, released in the USA last weekend, sparked a worldwide furore due to a scene where Peter Rabbit and his friends attack Tom McGregor with blackberries, causing him to have a serious allergic reaction.

Sony Pictures has since issued an apology stating that it should not have made light of McGregor’s allergies “even in a cartoonish, slapstick way”.

Allergy New Zealand says that while the public apology by Sony Pictures is commendable, it doesn’t go far enough to prevent food allergy bullying. The allergy support organisation is calling on Sony Pictures to take their efforts a step further by using the film to educate viewers in this country about the seriousness of food allergies.

Allergy NZ CEO Mark Dixon says a Public Service Announcement featured before the film could be used to educate audiences about food allergies and the numbers of Kiwi kids affected by them.

“Our main concern” Dixon says, “is that the film could encourage negative behaviour towards allergy sufferers, particularly primary school aged children”.

McGregor, the villain of the film, has a severe allergy to blackberries. Peter Rabbit and friends, the protagonists and “cool kids” plan to harm McGregor by using his allergies against him. The animals pelt McGregor with blackberries (his allergen) causing him to go into anaphylactic shock and administer his EpiPen to stop the allergic reaction.

Allergy NZ says it is disappointed that the film promotes bullying of this nature and that they have received calls from parents concerned about the dangers of children mimicking the actions seen in the film in school playgrounds.

There is also concern regarding the impact of the film on young children with food allergies, many of whom already experience high levels of anxiety.



While many around the world are calling for audiences to boycott the film (see #boycottPeterRabbit), Allergy NZ believes the film should be used as an opportunity to educate those who may not have any experience with allergies, highlighting the difficulties that many families and children with allergies encounter on a daily basis.

About Allergy New Zealand

Allergy New Zealand is a national charity dedicated to providing reliable information, education and support so you can manage your or your child's allergy and live an active and healthy lifestyle.

We also represent their interests particularly to government, policy makers and the media, provide information and guidance to the health, education and food sectors, and support research.

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