



## **River Valley Charter School Food Allergy Policy for the Management and Prevention of Food Allergies**

### **Food Allergy Policy**

River Valley Charter School considers the safety and health of all students and employees to be of the highest importance. Due to the prevalence of food allergies and the health risks of an accidental reaction to a food allergen, the River Valley Charter School Food Allergy Policy is to:

- Support student & staff safety through protocols that minimize the likelihood of severe or potentially life-threatening allergic reactions
- Establish rapid and effective response protocols in the case of a severe or potentially life-threatening allergic reaction
- Conduct thorough professional development and training for staff
- Educate all RVCS students and families to help minimize food allergy risks
- Involve students in the management of food allergies
- Provide transparency regarding risks to the safety of students and staff
- Provide a positive and inclusive educational program for all students.

### **Food Allergy Management & Prevention Plan**

In accordance with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and as advised by the United States Centers for Disease Control, River Valley Charter School (RVCS) has developed a Food Allergy Management and Prevention Plan (FAMPP) to apply all elements of the RVCS Food Allergy Policy.

The FAMPP is based upon the following five priorities:

- Active daily management of food allergies for individual children
- Preparation for food allergy emergencies
- Professional development about food allergies for staff members
- Education for children and family members about food allergies
- Creation and maintenance of a healthy, safe, and inclusive educational environment.

### **Priority 1: Create and Maintain a Healthy and Safe Educational Environment**

River Valley Charter School will strive to minimize the risk to all students with life-threatening food allergies while also seeking to build student and staff skills regarding the management of food allergies. Prevention measures and food restrictions will be tailored to the severity of the allergy and the needs of the individual student.

As a Montessori school, RVCS holds student independence and sound decision-making as important life skills. Accordingly, we believe that students who are developmentally capable should be offered the support and trust to develop their judgment in choices to help manage their food allergies. Creating an implied bubble of complete safety within the walls of RVCS not only restricts the development of student skills in managing their own safety, but can foster complacency if the allergen-free designation is seen as eliminating all risk. Since the school cannot guarantee the complete absence of known allergens, and since human error and accidental exposure will always

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exist as risk factors, we believe that creating an implied sense of complete safety could reduce daily vigilance and ultimately increases student risk.

The strengthening of student awareness and skills also brings added safety outside of the classroom since safety cannot be guaranteed on all field trips or life beyond the school walls. Since complete elimination of risk within the school walls is impossible, we believe that for our older students, an allergen-aware designation brings a higher level of vigilance than the false security of an allergen-free designation. This distinction between grade levels in the school is designed based on the typical developmental abilities of children. In situations where a student's developmental abilities fall below the typical range, additional precautions may be implemented that differ from those described above.

**Kinderhaus and Elementary I:** In general, for students with known life-threatening food allergies in grades kindergarten through grade three (Kinderhaus and Elementary I), their classrooms will be identified as free of known life-threatening allergens. This means that life-threatening food items will be prohibited from a classroom where a child has a life-threatening allergy. Classroom teachers will check food items brought into the classroom in student's lunches/snacks. Although this approach and the allergen-free designation implies a completely safe food environment, the School Director, School Nurse and classroom teachers will provide additional information to all students and families in such classrooms regarding the remaining potential for contamination and allergic reactions. It is the belief of RVCS that transparency about possible risk is a critical element in maximizing student safety. Should a known allergen be identified within the classroom, that food will be removed from the room and an alternative meal will be provided to the student. The School Nurse and/or classroom teacher will contact the family who sent the allergen into the room to review the FAMMP protocols.

**Elementary II and Middle School:** In general, for students with known life-threatening food allergies in grades four through eight (Elementary II and Middle School), classrooms will be identified as allergy-aware, meaning that parents/guardians will be strongly advised to avoid sending life-threatening food items into a classroom where a child has a life-threatening allergy, unless an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) indicates otherwise. Families and students will be educated about the allergens and the potential risks to student health. Teachers and students will be expected to follow all procedures and protocols to minimize accidental exposure to known allergens. Should a known allergen be identified within the classroom, that food will be removed from the vicinity of any student with identified allergies, and proper cleaning protocols will be followed. The School Nurse and/or classroom teacher will contact the family who sent the allergen into the room to review the FAMMP protocols.

For all K-8 classrooms where multiple life-threatening food allergies exist, restrictions will be guided by severity and risk, with priority given to airborne allergies with a history of anaphylaxis. The School Nurse and Consulting School Physician, with input from the child's physician, will determine designations in the least restrictive manner possible while safeguarding the health of students.

For all K-8 classrooms, should the parents of children with life-threatening food allergies indicate in writing that they feel an allergen-aware designation is not warranted for their child, the school will have the option to use an unrestricted designation for that classroom.

Signs shall be posted in a conspicuous place at every entry point to the classroom and in the classroom advising that there are students with life-threatening allergies and indicating whether the classroom is designated as allergen-free or allergen-aware. The exact wording on the sign shall vary in accordance with the measures contained within students' IHCPs and the school protocol.

### ***Community Food Sharing Protocol***

The school-wide policy is that food sharing between students at lunch and snack times is prohibited.

The protocol for preparing foods to be shared with students with documented life-threatening food allergies as part of the curriculum or for community events, or for shared food activities that extend beyond one classroom, is as follows:

- No food may be prepared at home for the purpose of sharing with other students.
- All foods/recipes to be prepared in the RVCS school building will be reviewed for allergens by the School Nurse prior to ingredients entering the school.
- All ingredients brought into the school will be reviewed for allergens by the School Nurse prior to preparation.
- Staff, volunteers and students preparing meals will be required to wash hands, countertops, cooking utensils, cookware and bakeware with detergent prior to and after use.

### ***Field Trip Protocol***

- Teachers will notify the School Nurse of the date and specifics of the trip in a timely manner.
- All conditions relating to the field trip environment should be appropriate for the needs of students with food allergies. The location of the field trip should be assessed to be safe for the student with the allergy.
- Students with life-threatening food allergies will travel with their parent/guardian or a trained RVCS staff member for all field trip transportation.
- An RVCS staff member trained in the administration of epinephrine must accompany students with food allergies during the entire field trip.
- A registered nurse will be assigned to accompany the student if medically necessary.
- Eating is prohibited while transporting students on local or nearby field trips. Special arrangements and accommodations may be made by RVCS staff, in conjunction with the School Nurse, for extended trips or situations that necessitate the need for snacks or meals.
- Chaperones shall not purchase food for students while driving for field trips.

The student's Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP) along with prescribed emergency medication will accompany the student when on a field trip or leaving the school grounds. No RVCS student with a life-threatening food allergy will be permitted to attend out-of-school field trips without a school-approved EHCP on file with the RVCS Health Office.

### ***Maintaining a Positive Psychosocial Climate for Children with Food Allergies***

All relevant aspects and provisions of the RVCS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and the RVCS Non-Discrimination Statement shall apply to all students, including those with food allergies. Through student and parent education, as outlined below, RVCS staff will make consistent efforts to provide emotionally, physically, and academically safe and supportive environments for all students and staff.

## **Priority 2: Procedures & Protocols to Support the Daily Management of Food Allergies**

In alignment with the Montessori priority of developing independence and sound judgment in students, any RVCS child who has a documented food allergy will receive guidance and education from the School Nurse and classroom teachers regarding procedures and protocols designed to minimize risk of exposure to known allergens (i.e., the content of the student's IHCP). This support will be tailored to the age and developmental abilities of each child.

At River Valley Charter School, each student at risk for anaphylaxis shall be allowed to carry an epinephrine auto-injector at all times, if the School Nurse and parents/guardians deem it appropriate. A medically-identified student may self-administer the epinephrine auto-injector if the School Nurse and parent/guardian deem it appropriate.

### ***Procedures for Identifying Children with Food Allergies***

- Parents/guardians are required to provide the RVCS School Nurse with a physician's written diagnosis of each food allergy. If a child has more than one diagnosed allergy, a separate diagnosis is required for each allergy.
- Parents/guardians are required to give the RVCS School Nurse documentation from a physician about prior history and current risk of anaphylaxis. This information is critical to minimize risk of exposure to allergens. Documentation from a physician directs the actions staff must take if a food allergen exposure were to occur.
- Food allergy information must be provided to the RVCS School Nurse prior to the opening day of each school year. The RVCS Health Office will disseminate allergy information packets to all families, which will be due back to the health office, completed, one week prior to the start of each academic year. Allergy information packets will be issued at Kinderhaus screening for children with known allergies, and over the summer for returning students with allergies. A student's Emergency Health Care Plan (described further below) will be reviewed after each reported allergic response, whether that event occurs at school or outside of school hours. Physician's written instructions must be provided immediately after the diagnosis of an allergen for students already enrolled and whenever a student is newly diagnosed with an allergy.

### ***Managing and Reducing Student Risk with Health Care Plans***

An Emergency Health Care Plan and an Individual Health Care Plan shall be developed for every student identified with a food allergy with potentially serious health consequences. The EHCP shall be written by the child's doctor and reviewed by the RVCS School Nurse. The IHCP shall be developed by the School Nurse and shared with the parents/guardians. This shall be done prior to entry into school for students previously diagnosed with an allergy; and it should be done immediately after diagnosis for students already enrolled but newly diagnosed with an allergy. No RVCS student with a life-threatening food allergy will be permitted to attend out-of-school field trips or any before or after school activities without a school-approved EHCP on file with the RVCS Health Office.

#### *Emergency Health Care Plans*

The purpose of a food allergy EHCP is to communicate known food allergy risks for a child and to establish a plan for responding to an allergic reaction. The EHCP, must be confirmed and signed by the child's doctor and a parent/guardian. Each student's EHCP will, at a minimum, include the following information:

- A recent photo of the child.
- Information about the food allergen, including a confirmed written diagnosis from the child's doctor or allergist.
- Information about signs and symptoms of the child's possible reactions to known allergens.
- Information about the possible severity of reactions, including any history of prior anaphylaxis (even though anaphylaxis can occur in children without a history of prior anaphylaxis).
- A treatment plan for responding to a food allergy reaction or emergency, including whether an epinephrine auto-injector should be used.
- Information about other conditions, such as asthma or exercise-induced anaphylaxis that might affect food allergy management.
- Contact information for parents and doctors, including alternate phone numbers for notification in case of emergency.

#### *Individual Health Care Plans*

The purpose of a food allergy IHCP is to establish and communicate day-to-day protocols for minimizing risk for a specific student with known life-threatening food allergies. The IHCP will be written by the RVCS School Nurse and shared with the child's parent/guardian. In cases of life-threatening allergies the IHCP must be completed prior to a student's attendance at RVCS.

Depending on the nature and extent of the student's allergy, the measures listed in the IHCP may include, but are not limited to:

- Implementing particular protocols for cleaning surfaces touched by food products.
- Implementing hand washing expectations, etc.

- Posting additional precautionary signs (e.g. in classrooms and classroom entryways).
- Posting and distributing prohibition notices for particular food items from certain classrooms.
- Prohibiting the sale or distribution of particular food items in the school.

### ***Emergency Protocols and Standing Orders***

At River Valley Charter School, the registered School Nurse shall prepare and update, as appropriate, but at least on an annual basis, written emergency protocols and standing orders in the event of injuries and acute illnesses, including anaphylaxis. These will be reviewed and approved by the Consulting School Physician at least annually. In addition, the Consulting School Physician shall also review at least annually the procedures for addressing incidents of anaphylaxis and the use of the epinephrine auto-injector. Such procedures must include accessing the community's emergency medical system (i.e. "911") and prompt transportation by a licensed ambulance/rescue service to an acute care facility for medical evaluation and follow-up.

The Consulting School Physician shall issue a standing order for the administration of an epinephrine auto-injector by the School Nurse for a student who has not been previously medically identified for prevention or treatment of anaphylaxis.

### **Priority 3: Food Allergy Emergency Response**

In addition to the existence of Emergency Health Care Plans (described above), RVCS staff will be familiar with the following general plans for the preparation of known and unknown food allergy emergencies. Staff will be trained in the following communication protocol:

- Access the 911 emergency call system. Have an adult stay on the line until first responders arrive.
- Immediately contact the School Nurse (during school hours) or a School Administrator, by phone or in person.
- Collaborate with first responders to communicate with Anna Jaques Hospital and alert them of the pending arrival of a student.
- Contact parents/guardians to alert them of the emergency and subsequent actions.
- Remove other students from the environment.

River Valley Charter School is well situated to provide prompt response to a life-threatening allergic reaction. Newburyport's ambulance company has a typical response time of four to six minutes, and Anna Jaques Hospital is located approximately one mile from the school.

### ***Access to Epinephrine Auto-Injectors***

Every child with a diagnosed life-threatening food allergy will have a designated epinephrine auto-injector in the School Health Office. Parents will have the option of providing an additional epinephrine auto-injector to be located in the student's classroom. Teachers (or students, if appropriate) will carry an epinephrine auto-injector on all field trips.

Adult and junior-dose epinephrine auto-injectors will be permanently located in the following locations at RVCS:

- The School Health Office
- The Before/After Care room
- The "annex" hallway outside the second-floor school library

### ***Documenting Response to a Food Allergy Emergency***

The RVCS Director, School Nurse, and staff will coordinate to take the following steps within 24 hours of a food allergy reaction:

- Call parent/guardian to follow up on student condition.
- Review anaphylactic or allergic episode with parent/guardian and student, and with student's physician if appropriate.

- Identify allergen and route of exposure—discuss signs and symptoms with parent/guardian.
- Review actions taken.
- Discuss positive and negative outcomes.
- Discuss any needed revision to care plan(s) based on experience or outcome.
- Discuss school and home concerns to improve prevention, response, and student outcomes.
- Ask parent/guardian to replace epinephrine dose that was given, if needed.
- Ask parent/guardian to follow-up with health care provider, and share results with RVCS School Nurse.

#### **Priority 4: Staff Training**

The River Valley Charter School Director, in conjunction with the School Nurse, will train all school teaching staff, including Before & After Care staff, in emergency preparedness including response to anaphylaxis. Training shall be provided prior to the start of classes, and at least once during the school year for these personnel on the following topics:

- RVCS food allergy policies and practices
- An overview of food allergies
- Definitions of key terms, including food allergy, major allergens, epinephrine, and anaphylaxis
- The difference between potentially life-threatening food allergy and other food-related reactions
- Signs and symptoms of a food allergy reaction and anaphylaxis and information on common emergency medications
- Proper epinephrine auto-injector administration, including practice with simulators
- General strategies for reducing and preventing exposure to allergens (in food and nonfood items)
- Use of the “911” emergency medical system, and preparation for movement and transport of the student
- RVCS emergency plans, including who will be contacted in the case of an emergency, how staff will communicate during a medical emergency, and what essential information they will communicate
- RVCS policies on bullying and harassment and how they apply to children with food allergies.

At all times during normal school hours (8:10 am to 3:30 pm Monday through Friday) and at on-site school-sponsored activities, at least one trained RVCS person must be present and responsible for the administration of the epinephrine auto-injector, subject to Good Samaritan provisions. These personnel shall review emergency protocols on an annual basis. If trained school personnel are not available, any willing person may administer the epinephrine auto-injector. Good Samaritan provisions apply.

All staff will receive training on school protocol regarding food preparation and consumption including that no food shall be prepared or consumed by students outside of the general education classroom without the prior consent of the School Nurse.

#### ***In-Depth Training for Staff with High Risk Students***

In addition to the general staff training outlined above, the School Nurse will review the IHCP and EHCP with the classroom teachers of each student, prior to the start of school, immediately after the diagnosis for students already enrolled who are newly diagnosed with an allergy, or prior to the enrollment of a new student during the school year. The School Nurse, in conjunction with the School Counselor, shall also provide training to these staff members on the following topics:

- Information about federal laws that could apply, such as the ADA, Section 504, and FERPA.
- Potential effects of food allergies on children’s behavior and ability to learn.
- Importance of giving emotional support to children with food allergies and to other children who might witness a severe food allergy reaction (anaphylaxis).

All staff who interact with a food-allergic student on a regular basis will be trained to understand the food allergy, recognize symptoms, know what to do in an emergency and work to minimize the risk of accidental exposure during meals, classroom and specialist projects, and at classroom-related field trips and social events.

The Director/School Administrator shall work with the transportation administrator to ensure that school buses are equipped with required communication devices and that drivers are properly trained to recognize symptoms of allergic reactions and know what to do in case of an emergency. A “no eating policy” should be enforced, with appropriate exceptions made to accommodate diabetic students and others with special dietary needs.

### ***Training for Undiagnosed Allergic Reactions***

In order to provide the most effective and rapid response to undiagnosed allergic emergencies, all RVCS staff will be trained to recognize anaphylaxis. Additionally, all staff will be trained in the administration of epinephrine auto-injectors, and to immediately seek the assistance of the School Nurse. (See also – FAMPP Staff Training Priority)

### ***Making Outside School Users Aware of this FAMPP***

RVCS will post a sign at its main entrance to alert visitors to become familiar with restrictions on classrooms that they will be visiting. In addition, any organization or entity that contracts to, or is otherwise approved by the School Director to use the RVCS facility, shall be required to provide written acknowledgement of receipt and review of the RVCS FAMPP, and agreement to abide by all allergen restrictions within the school building.

## **Priority 5: Student and Family Education**

All RVCS students, whether they share learning environments with students with food allergies or not, shall receive age-appropriate instruction about the existence of life-threatening allergies and safe management of food allergies. This instruction may be provided by the School Nurse, classroom teachers and/or the School Counselor, and shall focus on increasing awareness and understanding of food allergies as well as building support and acceptance of people with food allergies. As a result of this instruction, all children, as developmentally appropriate, should be able to:

- Identify the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- Know and understand the importance of finding a staff member who can help respond to suspected food allergy emergencies.
- Understand rules on hand washing, food sharing, allergen-safe zones, and personal conduct.
- Know and understand why it is wrong to tease or bully others, including people with food allergies.

RVCS staff members will be expected to model behaviors and attitudes that comply with student education, and will be expected to conform with the same classroom rules and guidelines as the students in order to minimize exposure to food allergens.

For students with known food allergies, RVCS teachers, in conjunction with the School Nurse, shall make explicit the following guidelines:

- Student should not share food with others.
- Student should not eat anything with unknown ingredients.
- Student should be proactive in the care and management of their food allergies and reactions based on their developmental level.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they see or smell something they believe may contain a food to which they are allergic.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they eat something they believe may contain a food to which they are allergic or if experiencing any signs or symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- Student should notify an adult immediately if they believe they are experiencing prejudice, discrimination or bullying related to their allergy.

All families of children with known life-threatening food allergies will be notified that the RVCS school kitchen is not an allergen-free facility.

### ***Effective Communication & Education with RVCS Families***

Successful implementation of the RVCS FAMPP requires support and participation from families of children with food allergies as well as from families of children without food allergies. In order to build such support, all RVCS families will annually receive the RVCS Food Allergy Policy and Food Allergy Management & Prevention Plan in the RVCS Family Handbook.

The RVCS Family Handbook will also include information to increase parental/guardian awareness and understanding of food allergies as well as the measures parents/guardians of children with and without food allergies can take to help minimize food-allergy risks within the classroom. Classroom teachers will provide information to all parents about what is being done to address food allergy risks in the classroom.

### ***Confidentiality***

Pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA), and other statutes and regulations, the National Association of School Nurses and National Association of Secondary School Principals' *School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies* and other statutes and regulations, the confidentiality of students with food allergies shall be maintained, to the extent appropriate and as determined by the School and by the student's parent/guardian.

### ***Policy & FAMPP Evaluation and Review***

This document shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, annually at a minimum, and after a serious allergic reaction has occurred at a school or at a school-sponsored activity.

## **\*\*\*Important Information Regarding Life-Threatening Food Allergies\*\*\***

The prevalence of food allergies may be increasing, affecting as many as 8% of children and 2.5% of adults nationwide. Food allergies result in about 30,000 emergency room visits and claim about 150 lives every year, with children and young adults being at greatest risk for having a fatal reaction. River Valley Charter School has students who have this severe, sometimes life-threatening condition. Schools are considered high risk areas for students with food allergies, with most incidents of accidental exposure occurring in schools. While schools will not be able to totally prevent allergic reactions, they can dramatically reduce both the likelihood of such reactions occurring and the severity of consequences if they do occur. Effective prevention and treatment plans, proper procedures, well-trained staff and clear communication can save lives.

The level of sensitivity and the types and severity of reactions vary considerably among individuals with food allergies. Accordingly, the school's approach to preventing and treating food allergies must be tailored to those individual's needs. At the same time, an undiagnosed student may experience an allergic reaction to food for the first time while at school and any allergic reaction can turn life-threatening. Therefore, the school's approach must also be comprehensive.



## **Definitions and Background Information**

*Anaphylaxis* is an acute allergic reaction that affects more than one system of the body. It is a life-threatening event. If someone exhibits difficulty breathing, a drop in blood pressure, or symptoms in more than one body system (cutaneous, respiratory, gastrointestinal, or cardiovascular) after possible exposure to an allergen, it should be considered anaphylaxis. Medical attention and treatment should be sought immediately.

*Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP)* is a set of procedural guidelines that provides specific directions about what to do in a particular emergency situation.

*Epinephrine (also known as adrenaline)* is the treatment of choice to prevent or treat anaphylaxis. It can help reverse the symptoms and prevent progression to other symptoms. It must be given by an individual trained in its proper administration. It should be given immediately. Any delay in treatment with epinephrine can be fatal.

*Epinephrine auto-injector (sometimes called an EpiPen)* is a device that is used for the automatic injection of epinephrine into the human body.

*Food allergy* is an abnormal, adverse reaction to a food that is triggered by the body's immune system. The immune system responds to an otherwise harmless food as if it were harmful, resulting in the release of various chemicals, including histamines. The most common food allergies are to peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soy, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, and wheat.

*Food allergy symptoms* are manifestations of the allergic reaction in various parts of the body symptoms and may affect:

- The cutaneous system (skin inflammation, tingling, itching, hives, rash swelling of the lips, tongue and/or throat)
- The respiratory system (runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing)
- The gastrointestinal tract (abdominal cramps, vomiting diarrhea)
- The cardiovascular system (drop in blood pressure, dizziness, lightheadedness, heartbeat irregularities, fainting, shock)

Symptoms can begin immediately upon, or up to two hours after, exposure to an allergen. Some individuals exhibit initial symptoms followed by a second phase of symptoms two to four hours later. If more than one system is affected, it is considered anaphylaxis.

*Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP)* is a comprehensive plan for the care of children with special health care needs, including food allergies. The IHCP is created by the School Nurse. IHCPs may include both preventive measures and treatment options.

*Emergency Health Care Plan (EHCP)* is a student specific plan for the response to an emergency situation. The EHCP is created by the child's physician. For a student with life-threatening allergies, EHCP's identify the steps school personnel will take following an accidental allergen exposure.

## **Reference Materials**

- Managing Life Threatening Food Allergies in Schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)
- School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies (NASN and NAESP)
- CDC FARE Program (Food and Allergy Research and Education)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA)