

Your child has recently received a diagnosis of nut allergy.

You may have some questions about how to keep your child safe as they grow older.

Last year, we asked over 500 of our food allergic families, living in Ireland, to allow us to record their activities, social behaviours and any allergic reactions.

We hope that the information that we have gathered will help answer some of your questions.

Of note, all names have been changed.



Are accidental allergic reactions common?

What parents say

Sophie: It is important not to become complacent as reactions are rare and to always be cautious"

Brian: "Shane (aged 8) had a mild reaction recently. He hasn't had a reaction since he was a toddler. It reminded him as well as me that he is still allergic and was a good opportunity to discuss treatment with him as he is getting older"

Here's what we found out:



During a 6 month period, 104 (21%) of the 500 children surveyed had accidental allergic reactions.

Over 2/3 of reactions are mild and were appropriately treated at home with antihistamine.

We discovered that over half of reactions occurred at home when the parent was with the child.

Take home message:

Your child will have reactions. Most will be mild. It is likely that you will be around when it happens.

Allergic reactions are mild or severe (anaphylaxis)

Mild reaction

- Hives or rash
- Swelling (eyes, lips)
- Stomach pain/
vomiting

Severe reaction

- Symptoms resulting in the child being unable to do any activity.
- E.g.
- Rash all over body
- Shortness of breath
- Bad stomach pain (crouched over)
- Throat tightness/hoarse voice

What parents say

I want my child to go to birthday parties, just like other kids.

Is that going to be unsafe for them to do?

Moira: "I always speak with the parent beforehand. The majority are very obliging".

Lorna: "Parents are so much more aware now. It makes parties so much easier for my now 11yr old."



Here's what we found out:

Almost all (94%) of our study group, aged 5 to 12yrs, attended birthday parties.

Almost half brought their own food to the party.

Only 5 reported an allergic reaction. None were severe.

Take home message:

With a little planning, food allergic children can have fun and stay safe at these important events.

What parents say

I want my child to be able to take part in extra curricular activities and learn new skills.

Will they be excluded because of their allergies ?



Here's what we found out:

Last year, 254 (80%) food allergic children aged 5 to 12yrs, took part in extra curricular activities.

None of them had an allergic reaction.

Patricia: "My child (aged 7) does sports 4 times a week without any problems"

Emily: "Swimming is a great activity with no food involved!"

Take home message:

There is no reason for a child's food allergy to stop them "taking part."

Does having a nut allergy mean that my child can never go "Trick or Treating" at Hallowe'en?

What parents say

Evelyn: "He doesn't eat anything he collects! I substitute his bag with one I prepared earlier"

Danielle: "I prepare a bag for Sarah and swap with her bag collected when we get home".

Here's what we found out:

Over 70% of our Irish study group aged between 2 and 12yrs took part in this activity last year

Out of a total of 500 children, only 2 reactions were reported.

Neither were severe.

Take home message:

Plan ahead and your little witches and zombies can have a great evening!



What parents say

Will I have to stop my child from going to play at friend's houses ?

Helen: Billy has one or two close friends. We know them very well.

Their parents always discuss with me what food they will give him when he visits.

Audrey: "When Colm was younger I would stay with him and bring his own food to friends' houses.

Now, he knows to check everything and all the parents are very aware of his allergies. Everyone is very good".



Here's what we found out:

85% of 5-12 yr olds in our Irish study group went to play at friend's homes.

Most of them (86%) visiting without their parents present.

60% ate food while there.

There were 7 allergic reactions reported.

6 were mild and only 1 was severe

Take home message:

Allergic reactions can occur when eating in friend's houses.

Building relationships with friend's parents is important.

What parents say

We like to celebrate family occasions in restaurants. Will we still be able to do this?

Mary: " We go back to the same places again and again. They know Sean's allergies which is so reassuring"

Tom: "When Abigail was small, we brought all her food with us. Now she eats out with us. She usually orders the same thing".

Erin: "My son was diagnosed with food allergy at 5 months. He is now 16. There is so much awareness around allergy now. Most people understand and John eats out with both his friends and his family".



Almost all (98%) of children with food allergies visit food establishments

87% of them order food from the menu

About 1 in 6 allergic reactions occurred in food establishments (restaurants, cafés, fast-food outlets)

Take home message:
Communication is key. Asking for ingredients and confirming ingredients when ordering with the waiting staff may help avoid reactions.

What parents say

I am worried about giving the creche the responsibility of keeping my child away from nuts. Are reactions common there?

Angela: "The playschool is brilliant".
"They give Bill (aged 2) his own treats from his treat box or jellies when there is a birthday party".

Anne: "All the food in the creche is baked on site and they do not use nuts which is very reassuring".



Here's what we found out:

Of the 137 children in our study of preschool age, 4 had reactions in creche/preschool.

3 were mild, 1 was severe.

All reactions were appropriately treated by the caregiver.

Take home message:

Food allergy affects 1 in 20 children in Ireland so creches and schools are increasingly experienced in keeping children safe and treating allergic reactions.

What parents say

Will we have to stop spending Christmas with our relatives?

Jenny: "The big boxes of sweets are a problem. We didn't let any into the house and warned all the relatives to keep them away".

Valerie: "Our routine was the same over Christmas. Reading all labels and reminding everyone about Josh's peanut allergy". Nothing too difficult about it".



Here's what we found out:

No reactions were reported at Christmas.

Take home message:

Continue your usual routine of reading labels and reminding friends and family of your child's allergy and you will enjoy this special time of the year as you always have.

Can you tell me what other Irish preschool aged children (2-4years) are doing?



Here's what we found out:

What parents say

Denise: "There are a few children in my little boys (aged 2) creche class with food allergies which means everyone is more in tune with allergies which is different to my older child's (aged 7) experience in creche".

Miriam: "Although my child (aged 3) does go to a friend's house with me, more frequently his friends come to our house!"

We found that 1 in 3 young children go to a friend's house and 2 in 3 go to parties.

They are always accompanied by a parent.

72% of 2-4 year olds go out trick or treating at Hallowe'en.

Take home message:

With adequate supervision, your little one can enjoy all the normal social activities of a preschool aged child

To recap:

Irish children with food allergy just like your child are taking part in social activities and eating out.

What are they doing?

They go to parties, visit friend's houses, take part in Hallowe'en and Christmas like everyone else.

How common are accidental reactions?

1 in 4 children had a reaction but most were mild. Only 14 out of 500 children had anaphylaxis and all recovered well.

Where are the reactions?

Most accidental allergic reactions occur at home (54%)

The next most common place is in food establishments (15%)

Thank you very much for participating in this study.

- We hope you have found the information helpful as you begin your journey with your nut allergic child.
- Please contact us if you have any queries relating to the content
- Study team: Dr Miranda Crealey, Dr Audrey Dunn-Galvin, Dr Aideen Byrne

This booklet is for use as part of a research study and should not replace advice from a healthcare professional.