

Dear Parents of the Middle School,

Welcome to a new school year at Holy Innocents'. We are all looking forward to a year of learning, exploring and growing!

There are many students in our school this year with **allergies** that we would like all parents to know about. The allergens we are most concerned about, because of their potential to cause an extreme allergic reaction, are **Peanuts** and **Latex**.

Peanut allergies have always been a common food allergy. There is no "cure" for a peanut allergy, and it is unlikely the allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish are outgrown. The only treatment is to avoid all products containing the peanut allergen.

Latex allergies are relatively new with the first incidents in the United States reported in 1988. There is no "cure" for a latex allergy either. There are more than 40,000 products containing latex that we are exposed to on a daily basis. Thus, eliminating their presence from the classroom setting is extremely difficult. There are certain fruits, vegetables, nuts and cereals that contain proteins similar to the proteins found in latex which cause allergic reactions in some people. This is called **cross-reaction, or cross-sensitivity**. Our students have known cross-reactions to the following foods: **avocados, bananas, kiwis, papayas, passion fruit, hazelnuts and chestnuts**.

Avoidance is the main key in managing these allergies. This means not coming in contact with anything that has even minute traces of latex, peanuts or peanut butter, or other foods that may cause a cross-reaction, as those listed above. Latex products can be identified by looking for the letters **NRL**, which stand for Natural Rubber Latex or the words **rubber** or **latex**. Foods that contain peanuts or peanut products may be labeled using words like **peanut extracts, ground nuts, mixed nuts, or natural flavoring**, along with obvious sources of peanut protein, **such as peanut butter and peanut flour**.

There is concern with both allergies that contact may come from **unexpected sources**. With a latex allergy cafeteria workers preparing food using latex gloves, bits of rubber eraser left on a desk, sporting equipment, glue in envelopes, sink nozzles, etc. may provide a source of allergen exposure. Peanuts can be concealed in processed foods like baked goods, candy, chocolate bars, cereals, potato chips, fried foods, chili, cookies, dips, egg rolls, icing paste, salad dressings, ice cream, and spaghetti sauces.

Education and Awareness: *If your child has an allergy, be sure that everyone who feeds and cares for the child knows about the allergy and what to do in case of an attack. Such is the purpose of this letter.* We want all parents to know of the allergies these students in the school have, so that when advisory parties, field trips, dances, and etc. occur you will be aware of what you may or may not want to bring into the school.

There has been a lot of controversy in the news about whether to ban peanuts and peanut products from schools. Many doctors feel that banning the products is not the answer, since it could produce a false sense of security. They feel education and awareness are the keys because fatal reactions to allergies can be prevented with careful avoidance and rapid use of epinephrine.

Anaphylaxis is an extreme allergic reaction that is more common than you may think. Up to 32 million Americans may be at risk for this life threatening emergency. Anaphylaxis occurs as a rapid, severe allergic response when a person is exposed to an allergen (an allergy causing substance). Reactions usually begin within minutes of exposure, but they can occur hours later and can produce various symptoms.

The allergen enters the bloodstream and causes the body to release chemicals that try to protect the body. These chemicals can cause dangerous **symptoms**, including:

- Breathing difficulty, wheezing, shortness of breath, coughing and hoarseness
- Swelling or flushing of the lips, throat, tongue, hands and feet
- Extreme hives
- Nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea
- Drop in blood pressure, dizziness, fainting
- Headache

We ask that you try to remember these students and check with your student's teacher when you would like to bring in items for a festive occasion to school.

Specific latex or NRL containing items that ***our student can not come in contact with are balloons, rubber gloves, rubber pencil erasers, art gum erasers, certain paints, rubber bands, stamp pads, some art glues and some sporting balls.*** Again remember the foods that cause a **cross-reaction are avocados, bananas, kiwis, papayas, passion fruit, hazelnuts and chestnuts.**

We at the school are making every attempt to avoid exposure for these Nut and Latex sensitive students and we ask the same from you.

Have a safe and healthy year,

Tammy Green, RN, BSN
Lower School/ Middle School Nurse

For additional information on peanut allergy, latex allergy, or anaphylaxis, please refer to the following resources listed below.

Latex Allergy: <http://www.choa.org/Menus/Documents/Wellness/teachingsheets/latexprecautions.pdf>

American Latex Allergy Association: <http://www.latexallergyresources.org/>

Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network: <http://www.foodallergy.org/>

EpiPen: <http://www.epipen.com/>