An Investigation of Parent and Child Perceptions of Food Allergy Practices, Protocols and Policies in Schools

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Abstract

Background: Currently, there are no gold standard school policies for food allergies in the US. Schools implement well-intentioned policies to protect children with food allergies; however, these policies often ignore how supportive and safe their school is about food allergies. 1) parents’ perceptions of how supportive and safe their school is about food allergies, 2) parents’ perceptions of how supportive and safe their school is about food allergies; and 3) how parent and child perceptions differ based upon school health and wellness policies.

Study Design, Setting, and Participants: Children ages 8-18 with a food allergy and their parents across the United States who met the inclusion criteria completed one semi-structured phone interview.

Outcome Measure and Analysis: Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Content analysis was carried out by two investigators, independently, to identify themes among mothers and children. Investigators met to discuss themes and reach consensus.

Results: Three major themes were derived from the phone interview transcripts. Both parents and children felt that additional policies are needed to improve safety and reduce the risk of reaction at school. Increased food allergy training and education, the elimination of outside food, and the social/emotional effects of these policies are important considerations. Based upon the results of this study, policies that may need to be considered include: increased food allergy training and education for teachers and staff, nut-free labels on food, and开关 policy changes.

Conclusions and Implications: Overall, both parents and children felt generally safe with their schools’ policies with some exceptions. Exclusions included cross-contamination, outside food being brought into classrooms, and bullying and seclusion in the school setting. Preparedness of each school to handle food allergies varies by location, as there are no federal guidelines and/or gold standard policies for food allergies.

Methodology

This study was approved by Bradley’s Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research. A pilot study was conducted to test and revise the interview script. Parents and children (8-18 years old) with at least food allergy completed semi-structured, audio-recorded one-on-one interviews (n=18 pairs). After completing interviews, each participant received a tangible incentive worth approximately $20 to thank them for their time. Demographic and related data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis to uncover themes among parents and children.

Objective

Explore children’s and parents’ perceptions of how supportive and safe their school is about food allergies.

Methodology

This study was approved by Bradley’s Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research. A pilot study was conducted to test and revise the interview script. Parents and children (8-18 years old) with at least food allergy completed semi-structured, audio-recorded one-on-one interviews (n=18 pairs). After completing interviews, each participant received a tangible incentive worth approximately $20 to thank them for their time. Demographic and related data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis to uncover themes among parents and children.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, both parents and children felt generally safe with their schools’ policies with some exceptions. Exclusions included cross-contamination, outside food being brought into classrooms, and the knowledge and awareness of their child’s food allergies among others within the school community. Striking a balance between safety and inclusion was important to parents in normalizing life for their children. While schools across the US have a variety of policies in place to protect children with food allergies, the social and emotional effects of these policies, in conjunction with safety, are important considerations. Based upon the results of this study, policies that may need to be considered include: increased food allergy training and education for teachers and staff, nut-free campuses, providing education to improve awareness of other parents, and banning outside food without a food label.

References