

What is a “Nut-Free” Environment?

Nationally, a majority of educational facilities have one or more children with known food allergies, and a significant percentage of children with food allergies have been accidentally exposed to a food allergen while attending parish related program.¹ Allergic reactions can be life-threatening and have far-reaching effects on children and their families, as well as on the programs they attend.² Because no treatment exists to prevent reactions to food allergies or anaphylaxis, strict avoidance of the food allergen is the only way to prevent a reaction.³

Saint Mary Magdalene is committed to offering a safe educational environment for all students, including students with food allergies, by working cooperatively with parents, students, and staff to minimize the risks of accidental exposure to a food allergen while on the campus. Because the severity of a previous reaction is no indication of future severity, St. Mary Magdalene assumes that all children with food allergies are at risk of developing a severe, life-threatening reaction with any exposure.⁴ Accordingly, St. Mary Magdalene prohibits parents, students, and staff from bringing any food item into the facility, including field trips and other church-sponsored events, that contains peanuts or tree nuts, or that, according to its label, is processed in a facility that also processes nuts, is processed on equipment that also processes nuts, or otherwise is labeled “may include peanuts or tree nuts.” Foods that do not contain these labels generally are considered safe to bring onto the campus; however, if the food is not labeled, parents, students, and staff should avoid bringing the food to StMM and, if the food is at StMM, staff should not give the food to any child with a food allergy and should minimize the potential of an airborne exposure.⁵

Although St. Mary Magdalene has implemented a nut-free policy and prohibits food labeled as containing or having been exposed to nuts, or processed in a facility that also processes nuts, we recognize that a student may inadvertently bring a food item to StMM that contains or has been exposed to nuts. In that case, the food will be sent home unopened with a note indicating that the food item contains nuts and is not allowed at StMM. Parents should understand that the implementation of a “nut-free” policy does not necessarily mean that there will never be foods with nuts in the campus setting, given that St. Mary Magdalene does not control all food items coming into the facility. Because of the risk of an inadvertent exposure, it is important that parents clearly communicate with their child’s catechist and with the parish DRE regarding the type and severity of their child’s food allergy, typical signs and symptoms their child exhibits if having an allergic reaction, and an appropriate course of action in the event of an exposure.

By working in partnership with students, parents & parish staff to (a) remove foods with nuts from the parish setting, (b) educate students, parents, catechists & staff on the prevalence and severity of food allergies, and (c) understand the symptoms related to exposure and respond swiftly and decisively to address incidental exposures, St. Mary Magdalene seeks to create a safe educational environment that minimizes the risks of inadvertent exposure and negative health consequences for students with food allergies.

For more information on food allergies, how to read food labels, and safe snacks for educational environments please visit:

- FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education): www.foodallergy.org
- “Snack Safely” provides a safe snack guide that is updated frequently at www.snacksafely.com/snack-guide. Click the green tab to view the guide.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs.” Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Federal law requires food labels in the United States to clearly identify food allergens and ingredients that are, or contain any protein derived from, common food allergens such as peanuts and tree nuts. Id.