

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

ES-M042:2011-12
October 18, 2011

TO: Elementary and Secondary Administrators

FROM: Marty Deacon, Executive Officer
Mary Lou Mackie, Executive Superintendent of Education

RE: **Peanut Substitutes and Anaphylaxis Protocol**
TIME SENSITIVE INFORMATION

A recent Toronto Star article about a soy-based peanut butter substitute (sometimes referred to as WOW butter) may generate some confusion as to the appropriateness of this product in our schools. The soy-based product looks, smells, and tastes like peanut butter and is being marketed to consumers as a safe substitute.

In keeping with Procedure 1470, Anaphylactic Management Plan, our approach to this product in our schools will be similar to our approach to any allergen. Please review the relevant sections of our Anaphylactic Management Plan - 1470. Section 3 highlights the importance of minimizing the risk in the management of anaphylaxis. While we can never completely eliminate risk, avoidance of allergens wherever possible, is key.

3. Reducing the Risk

3.1 Avoidance of a specific allergen is the cornerstone of management in preventing anaphylaxis.

3.2 Eliminating allergens from areas within the school where the anaphylactic student is likely to come into contact with the allergen may be the only way to reduce risk to an acceptable level. **If less allergen is brought into the school there should be less risk of anaphylactic reactions.** While schools cannot guarantee that an environment is completely safe, the School Anaphylaxis Management Policy will include necessary measures and procedures to reduce the risk of anaphylactic reactions and to assist staff in making the school as “allergen-free” as possible.

3.3 The greatest risk of exposure is in new situations, or when normal daily routines are interrupted such as supply teachers in the classroom, shared birthday treats or school trips. Young students are at the greatest risk of accidental exposure but studies have indicated that more deaths occur among teenagers due to their increased independence, peer pressure, and reluctance to carry medication.

As well, the procedure provides a checklist that includes these statements:

Establish the anaphylactic student's classroom as an allergy free area. (Elementary schools)

Ensure that peanut/nut avoidance signs are prominently displayed at all school entrances, around allergen-free areas, and around all common areas

While this product is not, in itself, an allergen, it does closely mimic a known allergen that is strongly linked to anaphylactic responses in some children. **It may be too difficult to distinguish the difference between this product and the allergen for staff and students, thus causing a risk in its use in schools.**

We recommend a pro-active, timely (within the next week) approach to informing your school community about our reasoning behind discouraging its use. The following has been created for your use in school newsletters, or in other methods of correspondence with your school community should you feel it is warranted in your school:

A new substitute peanut butter product is being marketed to consumers as a safe alternative for children to bring to schools in place of peanut butter. The Waterloo Region District School Board asks that parents refrain from including these kinds of products in your child's lunches or snacks.

These products tend to look, taste, and smell very much like peanut butter. While the product is nut free, it mimics a known allergen that causes anaphylaxis in some children to the degree that it is indistinguishable from the allergen. It is a convincing substitute, opening up the possibility that it can be confused as peanut butter, or worse yet, peanut butter could be confused as this soy-based product.

The safety and health of our students is our first priority, which is why our schools have procedures in place to minimize risk of anaphylaxis reactions in our students. We sincerely appreciate your cooperation in avoiding the use of these products to assist in our continued efforts to create a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Because we have had recent media calls for us to comment on our stance on substitute peanut butter, we request that you redirect any questions to the Communications Department. To avoid confusion, it would be important to have a coordinated response from the board.

If you have any questions or concerns, please direct these to Marty Deacon, Executive Officer, or Mary Lou Mackie, Executive Superintendent of Education.