

# The writing is on the wall: School kids need access to EpiPens

*By ACSH Staff — January 6, 2012*

About 8 percent of kids have to cope with a food allergy a reality brought to the fore this week by the death of a seven-year-old girl in Virginia, whose heart stopped due to an [allergic reaction brought on by a peanut](#) [1]. The child's death, however, could most likely have been prevented with a simple injection of the hormone epinephrine (adrenaline). The school's failure to administer the epinephrine is now raising questions about the management of children's allergies.

Currently, 48 states allow kids to carry epinephrine, provided they have a doctor's order and parental permission. An EpiPen, as one brand of the injectable medication is called, counteracts anaphylaxis (a whole-body allergic reaction that causes airways to tighten and can be fatal). However, pediatric allergy specialist Dr. Todd Mahr, who co-authored a report on food allergies for the American Academy of Pediatrics, would like to see federal legislation that goes one step further toward preventing such allergy-related fatalities. Dr. Mahr's proposal would allow schools to keep the injection on hand and administer the epinephrine even to children without a prescription given that serious allergic reactions can occur in kids who haven't yet been diagnosed. About 150 people in the U.S. die each year due to food allergies. Eighty to 90 percent of such fatalities result from an allergy to peanuts or tree nuts and, while some schools do have nut-free food policies, Dr. Mahr notes that even with such a policy, you can still never be certain.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom agrees with Dr. Mahr. Something as simple as an EpiPen can prevent a child's death, he says. Allowing schools to have such a treatment on hand should not be a problem: They are unlikely to be abused, and they're generally safe. Furthermore, symptoms of anaphylactic shock are not subtle, so it's easy to know when to use the pen.

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## **Links**

[1] <http://yourlife.usatoday.com/parenting-family/story/2012-01-04/Deaths-from-food-allergies-preventable-doctors-say/52380642/1>