

# Summer Camp Means Fun for Kids, But Panic for Some Parents



By Julianna LeMieux — June 29, 2016



When I realized that the incoming call on my phone was from

my son's summer camp, I answered it in my best fake-calm voice, assuring myself that it would be nothing more than a forgotten swim suit.

It was the first day of camp, and my hopes were high that he would have a blast this summer. Or, at least, not hate it. But I was about to find out that our summer was already off to a bad start. They were calling to tell me that he ate someone else's lunch.

For most parents, this phone call would be nothing more than one or two minutes out of their busy day, ending with a lighthearted joke about how bad their lunches must be if he's eating someone else's. For me, it ended in frustration and tears.

You see, for the rest of us, the greatest worry about summer camp is not whether our children will enjoy it -- it's whether or not they will be safe.

My son, who has celiac disease, cannot eat gluten. Although celiac disease is technically an autoimmune disease and not a food allergy, that biological nuance doesn't really matter on a day-to-day basis. He cannot eat gluten and he was given a piece of pizza for lunch.

There are eight foods (or food groups) that account for 90 percent of serious allergic reactions in the United States. They are milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts and tree nuts.

You would be hard pressed to find a school that is not nut-free at this point. Signs are posted, and snacks that are brought in from outside of the school are checked. And, that is a great start, but we have to do better. The number of food allergy related deaths is [hotly contested](#) <sup>[1]</sup>. But the closing of one child's airway because of a food allergy is one too many.

In schools, there are legal documents, such as something called the "504 plan," that can be drafted to ensure that a child has the protective measures put in place when he or she is around food. Summer camps do not take such formal measures. That being said, camps can be safe spaces. With effort, they can make themselves more aware and set policies into place to keep kids

safe. Also, with increased awareness, other parents can help to make camps safer. One child's safety is more important than another child's favorite peanut butter sandwich.

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[1] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/meredith-broussard/food-allergy-deaths-less\\_b\\_151462.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/meredith-broussard/food-allergy-deaths-less_b_151462.html)