

Published on C & G Newspapers (<http://www.candgnews.com>)

---

## Clinton Township, Macomb Township

December 17, 2014

# Chippewa Valley takes precautions against food allergies

**By Jeremy Selweski**  
**C & G Staff Writer**

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — A pair of recent incidents in Oakland County have brought the topic of food allergies to the forefront of people's minds, as parents and school officials are reminded of the seriousness of an often-overlooked area of public health.

In Chippewa Valley Schools, preventative measures are taken every day to protect the safety of students with severe food allergies. This is especially true at the elementary school-level, where classmates sharing snacks and treats is common.

According to Dr. Don Brosky, executive director of elementary education for the district, teachers and administrators at each school are trained for how to handle any food allergy emergencies.

"We always want to be proactive so that our students are not subjected to anything that could potentially cause them harm," he said. "The key to making that happen is establishing good communication with all of our staff, students and parents."

Poor communication skills are exactly what caused one local school board member to step down last month. Linda Grossmann, a former trustee with the Clawson Public Schools Board of Education, resigned from her position after a video clip from a Nov. 10 board meeting went viral. The video showed her making a controversial statement about children with food allergies.

"Well, you should just shoot them," Grossmann said at the meeting, upon hearing the news that children's birthday snacks had been discontinued because of the possibly dangerous effects on elementary school students with food allergies. After making the remark, Grossmann then said "no" and put her hands up, apparently to indicate that she was only joking.

However, her comment ignited ire from the Clawson community, and many parents demanded Grossmann's resignation. She complied and later apologized for what she said.

The reality of what food allergies can do to students also resulted in tragedy at Oakland University last month. Chandler Swink, a 19-year-old OU sophomore, died on Nov. 26 after he reportedly came into contact with homemade peanut butter cookies. According to multiple reports, Swink, who was diagnosed with a severe nut allergy at age 2, was at a friend's apartment where peanut butter cookies had been baked and was accidentally exposed to the cookies or their residue.

When he began exhibiting an allergic reaction, Swink injected himself with adrenaline and drove himself to the hospital, where he was found lying unconscious in the parking lot. Swink was in an allergy-induced

coma for a week before being taken off life support. It was reported that he had suffered anaphylactic shock, cardiac arrest and an asthma attack.

Because Swink's fate is a very real possibility for students with severe food allergies, Brosky stressed that all Chippewa Valley schools are ready to handle any problems that may arise. All parents of students with food allergies are required to fill out a form explaining their child's condition, and the school's teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers and health aides are all given copies of that form. In addition, all school employees are trained about what signs to look for if a student is having an allergic reaction, and they are equipped with EpiPens, which can be used to inject a student that is experiencing anaphylactic shock with a dose of adrenaline.

Most recently, before the start of the current school year, every Chippewa Valley school was visited by a registered nurse provided by the Macomb Intermediate School District, Brosky said. The nurse met with the administrators and health aides at each building to help them establish a new district-wide emergency action plan.

"We really tried to develop a comprehensive plan because we don't believe in taking a one-size-fits-all approach," Brosky explained. "We treat everything on a case-by-case basis."

According to Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE), it is estimated that about 15 million Americans have food allergies. Children are even more likely to experience them, or as many as one in every 13 kids in the U.S. Eight foods are responsible for roughly 90 percent of the known food allergies: peanuts, tree nuts, cow's milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, wheat and soy.

Nancy Gregory, director of communications for FARE, cited studies showing that about one-third of children above the age of 5 with food allergies have reported being bullied, teased or harassed because of their allergies. This bullying occurs across the country and not only at the hands of other children, but adults, as well, she said.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that the number of American children with food allergies increased by 18 percent from 1997 to 2007. The CDC also reports that as of 2006, about 88 percent of U.S. schools had at least one student with a food allergy.

Brosky pointed out that Chippewa Valley officials always strive to have the most relevant, up-to-date food allergy information at their disposal, as provided by medical experts. This allows them to make their schools as safe as possible, especially for kids with nut allergies.

"At this point, we do not have any nut-free schools in our district," he said, "but we are very conscious of these issues within each building. We always err on the side of caution to make sure that every building has plenty of areas that are nut-safe."

Within the elementary schools, one classroom in each grade level is designated nut-free in order to ensure that students have no contact with nut products whatsoever, Brosky said. In addition, all classrooms have nut-safe tables that are regularly cleaned and sanitized to eliminate any nut oils or residues. Beyond that, students returning to class from the cafeteria after lunch are encouraged to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer.

The other big issue is what to do about the lunches and snacks that students bring to school, as well as the treats that they bring for birthdays and holidays. Brosky said that teachers and administrators urge parents to be mindful of which foods they send to school with their kids. There are also rules in place that prevent certain treats, such as desserts with nuts in them, from being shared.

"No food products are distributed in the classroom without us knowing the full list of ingredients," Brosky

said. “And any treats that are brought in must be individually wrapped so that kids can take them home and eat them. We don’t want to discourage parents from preparing food for their child, but we want them to be aware of how that can affect other kids.”

Brosky noted how much the degree of caution over food allergies has increased over the last 10-15 years. He believes that advancements in technology, such as email, have helped raise awareness about this issue in schools.

“Fifteen years ago, we had an influx of new students with food allergies,” Brosky recalled. “Organized groups of parents got the word out, and that’s been good for everyone to better understand what these kids are facing. These are life-threatening allergies in some cases. Parents entrust us with the safety of their children, and we take that responsibility very seriously.”

*Staff Writers Julie Snyder, Victoria Mitchell and Thomas Franz contributed to this report.*

You can reach C & G Staff Writer Jeremy Selweski at [jSelweski@candgnews.com](mailto:jSelweski@candgnews.com) or at (586)218-5004.

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.candgnews.com/news/chippewa-valley-takes-precautions-against-food-allergies-79947>