
Education Committee

SHB 1562

Brief Description: Requiring posting of allergen information in public schools.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Sullivan, Tarleton and Orwall).

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to consult with the state Department of Agriculture to develop and disseminate guidance for school districts on how and what allergen information to display.
- Requires schools to display allergen information by September 1, 2016.

Hearing Date: 1/19/16

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Statistics.

In 2013 the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that food allergies among children increased approximately 50 percent between 1997 and 2011. About one in 13 children has a food allergy. Of this group, more than one-third has a history of severe allergic reaction. Almost one-third of food allergic children have multiple food allergies. In 2006 about 88 percent of schools had one or more students with a food allergy.

Food Allergies.

When a person's body has a specific and reproducible immune response to certain foods, the person has a food allergy. The immune system keeps the body healthy, by identifying and combating bacteria, viruses, toxins, parasites, and other foreign substances. In people with food allergies, the immune system mistakenly identifies certain foods as harmful. Symptoms of food allergy include:

- tingling, burning, or itching tongue, mouth, and lips;

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- swelling in the mouth, tongue, and lips;
- vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal cramps and pain;
- hives or eczema;
- tightening of the throat and trouble breathing; or
- drop in blood pressure.

The symptoms and severity of allergic reactions differ between individuals and can range from mild to life threatening. Avoiding a food allergen is the only way to prevent a reaction; there is no cure for food allergies.

According to the federal Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) of 2004, eight food groups account for 90 percent of serious allergic reactions in the United States.

They are:

- milk;
- eggs;
- crustacean shellfish;
- fish;
- wheat;
- soybeans;
- peanuts; and
- tree nuts.

Food Intolerances.

Many people confuse a food intolerance with a food allergy. Like an allergy, a food intolerance is an abnormal response to food, but unlike an allergy, the immune system is not triggered. Food intolerance symptoms vary greatly and can be mistaken for symptoms of food allergy, but are generally more chronic, less acute, and less obvious.

Anaphylaxis in Schools.

"Anaphylaxis" means a severe allergic and life-threatening reaction that is a collection of symptoms, which may include breathing difficulties and a drop in blood pressure or shock. Administration of epinephrine, also known as adrenaline, can reverse some of the effects of a severe allergic reaction.

There are a variety of state and federal laws in place to protect students with life-threatening allergies. Before attending school, the family of child who has a life-threatening health condition that may require medical services to be performed at the school must complete a medication or treatment order and a nursing care plan, in addition, staff must be trained. In 2008 the Legislature directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop anaphylactic policy guidelines for schools to prevent anaphylaxis and deal with the medical emergencies resulting from it. Districts were required to implement these guidelines and adopt their own policies by September 1, 2009. In 2013 the Legislature allowed school nurses and designated trained school personnel to use epinephrine auto-injectors on an emergency basis to respond to an anaphylactic reaction.

Washington State Department of Agriculture.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) inspects food products and recalls any products that contain a major food allergen, but are not properly labeled. The WSDA has prepared guidance on how to label foods containing allergens in accordance with the FALCPA.

Summary of Bill:

The OSPI must consult the WSDA to develop and disseminate guidance for school districts on how and what allergen information to display. The methods of display may include food labels, signs, and other notices. Schools must display allergen information by September 1, 2016. The term "allergen" may include the eight major food allergies described in the FALCPA.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.