New Horizon Academy
Peanut Allergy Facts

• Peanuts are one of the main causes of food allergies and, together with tree-nut allergies, are the leading cause of fatal and near-fatal food anaphylaxis. (Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction characterized by hives, swelling, difficulty breathing, wheezing, and gastrointestinal symptoms.)

• The incidence of peanut allergy has increased by 50 percent over the past 20 years.

• Most people do not outgrow peanut allergy (only 10 to 20 percent), unlike most other food allergies.

• The symptoms of allergic reactions are itching, hives, swelling of face, throat, and tongue, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea, difficulty breathing, wheezing, dizziness, loss of consciousness, and shock.

• Anaphylaxis is a systemic reaction that can lead to cardiovascular collapse and death. It requires immediate treatment with epinephrine.

• Since there is no cure as yet for peanut allergy, strict avoidance is the key to management.

• Be prepared to deal with accidental ingestion and anaphylaxis when there are children or staff members with peanut allergy. Epinephrine or an epi-pen should be readily available along with a rapid-acting liquid antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or hydroxyzine (Atarax).

• Epinephrine is the only drug that will treat anaphylaxis. It is better to over treat with epinephrine rather than under treat.

• Learn to read labels and ingredient lists.

• Be aware of the problem of hidden allergens, cross-contamination, and indirect exposures.

• Peanut allergy is caused by a specific immunologic response to peanut protein.

• Peanut allergy is usually genetically determined and inherited.

• Peanut allergy is more common in an individual who has other allergic diseases, such as hay fever, asthma, or eczema, or an individual who has close relatives, such as siblings and parents, who have allergic diseases.

• Potentially allergic infants should be breast-fed for the first six months to minimize exposure and sensitization to food proteins. Ideally, the maternal diet should not contain highly allergenic foods.

• Highly allergenic foods, such as peanuts, tree nuts, and seafood, should be withheld from the potentially allergic child’s diet until age three years. In general, this appears to be the age at which the child’s immune system and gastrointestinal tract is able to handle and process these highly allergenic foods.

• Education, increasing public awareness, and prevention remain the principal approaches to this increasingly common problem.