



## Office of Children and Family Services

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Governor

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Commissioner

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Dear Provider:

To show support for children with food allergies, OCFS is sharing information about the Teal Pumpkin Project. The initiative encourages sharing non-food treats with children with the goal of making sure everyone feels safe and included in the fun.

### What is the Teal Pumpkin Project?

Spearheaded by Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE), the Teal Pumpkin Project is a nationwide campaign, and a symbol of awareness aimed at making fall fun inclusive for children with food allergies. The display of a teal pumpkin or sign signals to families that non-food treats are available and allows everyone to participate in the fun without fear of allergic reactions.

Many holidays can be challenging for families managing food allergies. Approximately 1 in 13 children in the U.S. live with food allergies, and for many, **even a trace of an allergen can trigger serious or life-threatening reactions**. The Teal Pumpkin Project is a way for children to participate safely in food-focused holiday celebrations.

### Ideas for Non-Food Treats

FARE encourages offering small, non-food items instead of—or alongside—candy, placed in a separate bowl to avoid cross-contamination. Popular choices include:

- Glow sticks, bracelets, or necklaces
- Pencils, crayons, markers, erasers
- Stickers, spider rings, novelty toys (mini slinkies, finger puppets)
- Bubbles, playing cards, mini notepads, bookmarks, and more

[Click here](#) to visit the FARE website for more non-food treat ideas.



It is important to carefully consider the types of treats you share with children and whether they are age appropriate. For example, glow sticks may have toxic chemicals inside them that can be harmful if ingested while small toys can present choking or other hazards to children.

### How to Participate

- Display your support—place a teal pumpkin or printable FARE sign in a visible location to let families know that non-food treats will be available during festivities. [Click here](#) to download a printable FARE sign (available in English, Spanish, and French).
- Stock up—gather a variety of non-food treats.
- Keep it safe—separate candy and non-food items into clearly labeled bowls.

## Tips for Celebrating within Your Program

- **Avoid homemade snacks.** Homemade treats may contain hidden allergens and cross-contamination risks. Carefully review the ingredients labels on any food served in your program and remind parents to only provide pre-packaged snacks, if they bring in items from home.
- **Keep treats in their original packaging with ingredients listed.** If you, staff, or families bring in treats to share, leave them in their original packaging so caregivers can check labels and safely share with children.
- **Supervise distribution.** Never let children share food. Explain why. Caregivers must monitor carefully and follow each child's individual dietary guidelines.
- **Model inclusion.** Focus on the celebration, not just the food. Activities like themed games, decorations, or crafts are a great way to engage everyone in the group!

## Don't stop there!

In addition to the Teal Pumpkin project, another way to increase allergy awareness in your program year-round is by participating in the Non-Patient Specific Auto-Injector Initiative. Individuals in your program may be experiencing events for the first time, including new foods and treats. There is no way to predict when a person will have an allergic reaction for the first time. Epinephrine is the first line drug of choice for the emergency treatment of severe allergic reactions. Having non-patient specific auto-injectors in your program's emergency tool kit may save a life! [Click here](#) to visit the OCFS website for more information on the [OCFS Anaphylaxis Policy](#), the Non-Patient Specific Auto-Injector Initiative or contact the Elijah's Law mailbox with questions: [ocfs.sm.ElijahsLaw@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:ocfs.sm.ElijahsLaw@ocfs.ny.gov).

By increasing allergy awareness in your program, you help every child enjoy holidays with joy and provide peace of mind to families. Your efforts send a powerful message of inclusion, and quality programming.

Wishing you all a safe and happy fall season!

Sincerely,



Nora Yates  
Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Child Care Services