

**Open letter backed by 40 organisations calls for urgent action to protect pupils with allergies in English schools**

On 23rd April 2024, the family of schoolboy Benedict Blythe who collapsed and died from anaphylaxis in December 2021 aged just five years old, will be accompanied by representatives from the National Allergy Strategy Group to present an open letter to Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education, at 10 Downing Street.

The letter outlines the evidence and steps for change, and is supported by organisations from across education, allergy, health, child wellbeing, school food, and industry. These charities and businesses have united to call for urgent implementation of new safeguarding measures, and funding to be made available for roll-out across English schools.

The open letter follows the publication of the REACT report in April 2024, which highlighted a ‘postcode lottery’ among schools when it comes to having allergy safeguards available. Despite an estimated 680,000 school aged children having a known allergy, and following several high-profile pupil deaths due to allergic reactions in schools in recent years, **two in three schools still do not have the recommended allergy safeguards in place.**

The report was compiled by Benedict Blythe Foundation, an organisation launched in memory of five-year-old Benedict. It represents the **largest-scale freedom of information request on the subject of allergies in schools**, with requests made to over 20,000 English schools. The report can be found here: <https://www.benedictblythe.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BBF_React_v4.pdf>

Additional key findings from the report included:

* 1 in 3 schools do not have an allergy policy, of the ⅔, there’s huge variance in accessibility and content
* 70-80% of schools do not train on what food allergy is, inclusion or the impact of allergy on pupils
* Between 54-61% schools provide no training in managing allergies in school or on trips / visits
* Almost half of schools will not have a spare lifesaving autoinjector pen
* 1 in 3 schools admit to not keeping track of ‘near misses’ (where a child has contact with an allergen)
* 14% of schools don’t have IHPs for all pupils with an allergy, although this figure in reality is much higher as the 86% often make choices about which allergic children have one

The report showed that while measures remained unfunded and voluntary, children with allergies were needlessly being put at risk.

This open letter provides a clearly united stance from organisations with a breadth of perspectives and positions, showi

**Fatal anaphylaxis is rare, but allergic reactions in schools are not**

Food allergy affects around 7.0–8.0% of children worldwide, or about two children in an average-sized classroom of 25 children (Santos et al., 2022). Children spend at least 20% of their waking hours in school and data shows that 18% of food allergy reactions and 25% of first time anaphylactic reactions occur at school (Higgs et al., 2021). Anaphylaxis due to food allergy occurs in schools more than in any other setting outside the home(Muraro et al., 2014). and around 30% of allergic reactions in schools occur in children previously not diagnosed with an allergy (Santos et al., 2022). 79% to 83% of severe food allergic reactions occurred in the classroom, not the dining room(Canon 2019).

Food-related anaphylaxis has increased considerably over the past 20 years, particularly in younger children, with UK hospital admissions for food anaphylaxis rising by an average of 5.7% each year between 1998 and 2018. The largest increase was observed in children younger than 15 years, with a total of 66 fatal events recorded in school aged children. Peanut was the most frequent cause, followed by cow’s milk. (Conrado et al. 2021). In a recent survey by The Allergy Team, nearly half of school staff (42%) said that they had not been trained in school to recognise and treat an allergic reaction within the last 12 months and 58% parents of pupils with allergies say they’ve had reactions or ‘near misses’ at school.

The letter can be found at [Protecting Pupils with Allergies in Schools | Benedict Blythe Foundation](https://www.benedictblythe.com/safe-schools/protect-pupils-with-allergies/)

**Note for Editors**

The open letter will be delivered to 10 Downing Street at 10am on 23rd April 2024, a photo of this will be added to this google drive folder immediately afterwards: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1r_OQdpT9gIHX_drGILLWIRgoug6GjMNI?usp=drive_link>

The full letter can be found at[www.benedictblythe.com/open-letter](http://www.benedictblythe.com/open-letter) from the evening of Monday 22nd April. A full list of supportive organisations can be provided on request from 5pm on Friday 19th April 2024.

Additional stats from a 2023 Teacher Survey by Benedict Blythe Foundation can be found [here.](https://www.benedictblythe.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/BBF_v2.pdf) Examples from Allergy Stories can be reproduced and used in articles without express permission to add human experience to the data. For more information about the work of Benedict Blythe Foundation visit: [Benedict Blythe Foundation Allergy & Education Foundation | Benedict Blythe Foundation](https://www.benedictblythe.com/)

Additional information can be gathered from the [Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/15/its-one-of-the-great-mysteries-of-our-time-why-extreme-food-allergies-are-on-the-rise-and-what-we-can-do-about-them) long-read published this year and on [BBC Breakfast](https://youtu.be/LzCt60HX61k?si=6e4hWEy-pcXOjG8t) interview from 27/2/24

***Important: Helen and Pete Blythe are waiting for a date for the inquest into their son’s death. At this stage, they do not know why Benedict died or fully understand the circumstances or events of that day. While they want to improve understanding of food allergies in schools and training for staff, it would be wrong to suggest any wrongdoing by Benedict’s school until all facts are known.***