Allergen Introduction & Weaning Policy

Grass Roots Nursery Group
Updated September 2026

1. Policy Statement

Grass Roots Nursery Group recognises weaning as an exciting developmental milestone that supports children's confidence, independence, and long-term health. We are committed to working in partnership with families to ensure children develop a healthy, varied diet and enjoy family-style meals with their peers.

We follow the EYFS Statutory Framework (2026), NHS Start for Life guidance, and the DfE *Early Years Nutrition Guidance* (2024–2026). This includes:

- introducing a wide variety of tastes and textures from 6 months
- offering nutritious, balanced meals without added salt or sugar
- supporting safe allergen introduction
- ensuring food is prepared in ways that reduce choking risk
- promoting responsive, child-led feeding

We treat weaning routines as relational learning moments. Practitioners embed Emotion Coaching, serve-and-return communication, and rich language interactions during feeds to create a calm, safe, and emotionally supportive atmosphere.

2. Purpose & Scope

This policy ensures:

- weaning and allergen introduction follow DfE nutritional guidance
- children receive safe, developmentally appropriate feeding support
- allergens are introduced using a structured Home-First approach
- kitchen teams follow strict cross-contamination and food safety protocols
- choking prevention measures are embedded in daily practice
- families receive clear, consistent guidance
- medically diagnosed allergies are managed safely and legally

This policy applies to:

- all employees
- apprentices and students
- volunteers
- agency staff
- parents/carers

It covers:

- allergen introduction
- texture progression
- safe food preparation
- choking prevention
- communication with families
- medical documentation requirements

3. Statutory Framework & Reference Guidance

This policy operates in full compliance with:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (DfE, 2026)

Allergen Introduction & Weaning Policy

- DfE *Early Years Nutrition Guidance* (2024–2026)
- NHS Start for Life Weaning Guidance
- UKHSA Health Protection in Children and Young People Settings (Infection Control)

Key DfE-aligned principles include:

- no added salt or sugar in meals
- offering a variety of vegetables, fruits, pulses, and grains
- safe texture progression from smooth → mashed → soft lumps → finger foods
- avoiding foods that pose choking risks
- ensuring water is the only drink offered at mealtimes

4. Operational Procedures

A. Home-First Allergen Introduction Approach

Supportive Start

Parents are asked to trial each of the **14 major allergens** at home first, in a calm, 1-to-1 environment. This ensures children's first exposure is safe and closely monitored.

Two Successful Trials

Once a child has trialled an allergen twice at home with no adverse reaction, parents must inform the Key Person or update Famly. Practitioners will then incorporate that food safely into the child's nursery meals.

Why Home-First Matters

This approach ensures:

- children's first exposure is controlled and safe
- staff can confidently serve foods already tolerated
- kitchen cross-contamination risks are reduced
- children feel included during communal mealtimes

B. Shared 12-Month Goal

By 12 months, children are usually ready to transition to the full nursery menu and enjoy the same hot, fresh meals as their peers.

Presumption of Exposure

From 12 months, our menu is prepared with the presumption that children have safely trialled all 14 major allergens unless medically exempt.

This supports:

- safe kitchen operations
- reduced cross-contamination risk
- inclusive mealtimes
- consistent nutritional provision

Children with diagnosed allergies will follow an Individual Healthcare Plan and a personalised dietary plan.

C. Texture Progression & Safe Feeding (DfE-Aligned)

DfE Texture Guidance

We follow the recommended progression:

1. **Smooth purees**
2. **Thicker purees**

3. **Mashed foods with soft lumps**
4. **Soft finger foods**

Food Modification
All finger foods are prepared soft and cut lengthwise into quarters. Spherical foods (grapes, cherry tomatoes, sausages) are strictly quartered lengthwise.

Foods Not Served to Under-1s
We do not serve the following foods to children under 12 months:

- whole nuts
- popcorn
- hard raw vegetables (unless softened)
- honey
- added salt
- added sugar
- sweetened drinks
- whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, or other spherical foods

From 12 months onwards, children may have raw vegetable crudités **cut into thin sticks** and other age-appropriate textures in line with DfE safer eating guidance.

Active Mealtime Supervision
Children eat seated upright at tables or highchairs. Staff sit facing children, maintaining direct sight and hearing.

Paediatric First Aid (PFA)
A PFA-qualified staff member is physically present in the room during all meals and weaning sessions.

D. Supporting Families

Guidance & Resources
Key Persons provide NHS Start for Life resources and practical weaning advice.

Flexibility
If developmental or medical needs delay allergen introduction, staff will work with families to create a personalised plan or Individual Healthcare Plan.

Regular Check-Ins
Practitioners check in with families during the 6–12 month window to monitor progress and celebrate milestones.

5. Medical Safety & Diagnosed Allergies

Children who cannot follow the standard menu after 12 months due to a diagnosed allergy or medical condition must provide:

- official medical documentation (GP or consultant letter)
- a completed Individual Healthcare Plan

This ensures the nursery chef and management team can safely and legally manage dietary requirements within strict kitchen protocols.

Allergen Introduction & Weaning Policy

6. Monitoring & Review

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if DfE, NHS, or EYFS guidance changes.
The Nursery Manager, Chef, and DSL are responsible for ensuring consistent implementation across all settings.

7. Linked Policies

- Food & Nutrition Policy
- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Inclusion & SEND Policy
- Intimate Care Framework
- Nappy Changing Policy

Allergen Introduction & Weaning Policy

Appendix: The 14 Major Allergens

- Celery
- Cereals containing Gluten (wheat, rye, barley, oats)
- Crustaceans
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk
- Molluscs
- Mustard
- Tree Nuts
- Peanuts
- Sesame Seeds
- Soya
- Sulphur Dioxide / Sulphites