

Handling Food Allergies

Food allergies can be deadly. That is why they need to be taken very seriously by the food service industry. As a food handler it is important to be aware of food allergies – the health and safety of your customers could literally be “in your hands”.

What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy is the body’s negative reaction to a protein found in a certain food. When *any* of this protein is eaten the immune system identifies the protein as ‘foreign’ and tries to get rid of it. This causes the body to have an ‘allergic reaction’. Allergic reactions can be mild or severe and may include:

- ▶ headaches
- ▶ hives
- ▶ nausea
- ▶ vomiting
- ▶ diarrhea
- ▶ swelling of the lips, throat, tongue or face
- ▶ coughing or wheezing
- ▶ anaphylactic shock – which can lead to death.



The top allergy-causing foods are:

- ▶ peanuts
- ▶ nuts
- ▶ fish
- ▶ shellfish
- ▶ eggs
- ▶ milk.



Can Food Allergy Reactions Be Prevented?

Yes! Preventing allergic reactions is a shared responsibility between food service staff and the customer. You can do your part by:

- ▶ always taking requests for ingredient information seriously
- ▶ being sure about the answers you give
- ▶ knowing how to get accurate food ingredient information
- ▶ always using proper food handling techniques.



The following tips can help safeguard your kitchen from a food allergy*:

- ▶ always wash hands before preparing and handling food
- ▶ *thoroughly* clean and sanitize work and cooking surfaces, utensils and any equipment that touches the food
- ▶ use separate cooking equipment and utensils when preparing foods for customers with food allergies to avoid cross-contamination. For some people, eating even traces of these foods may be enough to cause an allergic reaction and possibly death
- ▶ store allergy-causing foods separately in both the fridge and dry storage
- ▶ be sure to label all food products with ingredients whenever possible and have a recipe binder available.

Want more information? Contact the Health Line at 271-7600 ext 267 or Listowel area residents call 1-877-271-7348.



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