



Cross Contamination and Preparing Allergen Free Food Safely

Cross-contamination happens when one food comes into contact with another food and they mix. As a result, each food then contains small amounts of the other food protein. These amounts are so small that they usually can't be seen. Even a tiny amount of food protein has caused reactions in people with food allergies.

Examples of Cross-Contamination and How to Avoid It

A knife that has been used to cut a sandwich containing spread peanut butter is only wiped off before being used by someone else to cut another sandwich which does not contain peanut butter. There could be enough peanut protein remaining on the knife to cause a reaction in a person who has a peanut allergy.

All equipment and utensils must therefore be cleaned with hot, soapy water before being used by someone with a food allergy. Even a trace of food on a spoon or spatula that is invisible to us can cause an allergic reaction.

Do not offer to cater for a food allergic child if you are unable to do so safely.

Handwashing

Washing hands and cleaning surfaces properly reduces the risk of exposure to food allergens. We recommend teaching children, school staff, and caregivers appropriate handwashing, emphasizing the use of soap and water. **Hand sanitizers are not effective in removing food allergens.**

Ensuring proper hand washing at home and at school in the classroom, cafeteria, on the school bus, field trips, during recess and activities before or after school can help to reduce **cross-contamination** of allergens.

Preparing Allergen Free Food and Meals

Some practices to reduce cross-contamination allergens include the following:

- Clean and sanitize with single use paper towels and soap and water, or all/ multi-purpose cleaning agents and sanitizers, all surfaces that come into contact with food in the kitchen, and other locations where food is prepared or eaten.
- Where allergen free meals are prepared:
 - Ensure suppliers provide accurate written details about all ingredients contained within a product and the food specification document for the food product including the allergen information.
 - Check deliveries for damage/split packaging; reject products if there is a risk they could be contaminated.
 - Ingredients used to prepare allergen free meals should be stored on a top shelf, in dedicated, labelled containers, separately from other foods. Do not store ingredients containing food allergens on the same shelf or above ingredients which are allergen free.
 - When storing any foods in containers always label to retain: name of product, allergens, 'use by' date/best before date.
 - All preparation areas, work surfaces, all utensils and pots and pans need to be washed with hot soapy water (soap is used because it deactivates the protein that causes the allergy). The work surface areas, counters and cutting surfaces, need to be cleaned thoroughly between use.
 - Clean and sanitize food preparation equipment, such as food slicers, utensils, chopping boards before and after use to prevent cross-contact. Always use hot soapy water or all/ multi-purpose cleaning agents and sanitisers.



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- Clean and sanitize trays and baking sheets after each use. Oils can seep through wax paper or other tray liners and cause cross-contamination. Tree nuts and nut products (for example: Almond, hazelnut, walnut, cashew nut, pecan nut, Brazil nut, pistachio nut, macadamia nut).
- Change the oil after frying foods containing food allergens as they may leave traces in the oil, which can be transferred to other foods.
- Cleaning cloths, tea towels, oven gloves/cloths must be used with care to minimise the risk of **cross-contamination**.
- **Always wash the tables at which children with food allergies sit using the correct and safe procedure.**
- Use appropriate hand-washing procedures using soap and water. Plain water on its own and hand sanitizers are not effective in removing food allergens.
- A study found that for removal of peanut allergens from hands, liquid soap, bar soap and commercial wipes were very effective. Plain water and antibacterial hand sanitizer left detectable levels of peanut allergen on 3 out of 12 and 6 out of 12 hands, respectively.¹
- Avoid the indiscriminate use of food allergens as garnishes e.g. as peanuts, cheese, sesame, tree nuts, seeds.
- Service areas:
 - Do not transfer food from one dish to another.
 - Use dedicated utensils for each dish on display
 - Clearly label foods if they contain food allergens
 - Do not splash food around the service area; this may contaminate another food.

¹ Distribution of peanut allergen in the environment. Perry TT, et al. 2004, J.Clin Immunol, Vol. 113, No. 5.