

ALLERGENS

What are they?

Food allergens are food ingredients that may cause an allergic reaction in certain individuals. In Canada, there are 10 priority food allergens (substances which causes allergies):

- peanuts
- sesame
- eggs
- seafood (fish, crustaceans, shellfish)
- soy
- wheat
- mustard
- tree nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts [filberts], macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts [pignolias], pistachio nuts, & walnuts)
- milk
- sulphites

However, any ingredient can be considered an allergen.

How severe can the reactions be?

Allergic reactions may vary depending on the allergen and the individual involved. Reactions can be very mild. However, severe reactions or anaphylaxis can be immediate and life threatening. Individuals at risk of anaphylaxis must carry an antidote (i.e. epinephrine) at all times.

What dairy products are of most concern?

Many dairy products contain ingredients that are common food allergens. Examples include flavoured ice cream and yogurt which commonly contain ingredients such as nuts and fruit. Products containing nuts and their extracts and oils are of particular concern as these are known to cause severe reaction in sensitive individuals. Very small amounts, even dust particles, can initiate severe reactions.

How do sensitive people protect themselves?

People with allergies rely on accurate ingredient listings to determine if a food is safe for them to eat. As such, it is critical that the ingredient listing on the product label accurately identifies allergens present in the product.

Will product labelling guarantee safety?

No! Good manufacturing practices must always be followed to ensure that allergens are not accidentally added to a dairy product. The following practices have resulted in allergic reactions:

- ✗ cross-contamination of product through improper cleaning of surfaces and utensils
- ✗ use of equipment that is not easily cleaned (i.e. flat edges and porous conveyor belts)
- ✗ putting product in the wrong package
- ✗ using mixed packaging materials from suppliers
- ✗ using mixed ingredients, particularly nuts, from suppliers
- ✗ adding allergen containing rework to a non allergen containing product

What steps can be taken to prevent contamination?

- ✓ do not rework flavoured ice creams and other dairy products into other types of flavoured products
- ✓ visually inspect all equipment that may contact allergens after it is cleaned
- ✓ implement an allergy residue testing program
- ✓ clearly segregate and identify boxes of nuts, especially those coated in chocolate, upon receipt
- ✓ contents of boxes of nuts should be visually examined for 'blends' before being added to the product
- ✓ ...ingredient control and formulation...
- ✓ regularly review ingredient listings and packaging to ensure that the information is correct and up to date
- ✓ ensure workers are properly trained on sanitation and allergen control procedures

References

CFIA: A Tool For Managing Allergen Risks in Food Products.

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/labelling/core-requirements/ingredients/allergen-labelling/allergen-risks/eng/1357659722449/1357665699917>

Health Canada: Food Allergen Labelling. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/allergen/index-eng.php>

For further information please contact the Dairy Plant Specialist at 604.707.2440

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