

## ALLERGIC REACTION CAUSED BY A FOOD ALLERGEN

### What are food allergens?

Food allergens are food ingredients that can cause an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals. There are a very wide variety of different food ingredients that individuals may be sensitive to. The most common include lactose, fruit, nuts and their oils and extracts.

### How severe are the allergic reactions?

The allergic reactions can vary depending on the allergen, the degree of sensitivity of the individual involved, and the amount consumed. Reactions can range from very mild to immediate and extremely life threatening. Individuals susceptible to severe reactions carry an antidote at all times.

### What happened in this incident?

A 3-year old boy known to be severely allergic to a number of foods including milk, eggs, peanuts, potatoes and beef-products, was given a serving of lemon sorbet. Within 20 minutes of consuming the sorbet, he began experiencing severe allergic reactions. He was administered the antidote and fortunately survived the ordeal.

### What caused the reaction?

The lemon sorbet that the boy consumed was labelled as containing "filtered water, sugar, lemon juice, corn syrup, fruit pectin, natural flavour and citric acid." However testing of the two packages of sorbet (one was unopened) at the boy's home revealed the presence of minute quantities of milk products in both packages. The presence of these undeclared milk products caused the allergic reaction in the boy.

### The investigation at the dairy plant.

The lemon sorbet was produced at a local dairy plant. It was learned that the equipment used to produce and package the sorbet was also used to produce and package ice cream. While it could not be proven, it is surmised that after producing the ice cream, the equipment was not adequately cleaned to remove all traces of the ice cream prior to producing the sorbet. As a result, minute quantities of the ice cream were accidentally added to the sorbet.

### How to prevent this from happening to you?

Make sure that cleaning procedures for shared equipment are effective. All traces of the "previous" product must be removed prior to producing the "second" product. Other steps you can take to prevent an allergen contamination include:

- visually inspect all equipment that was used to package products with potential allergens (especially nuts - they can be hard to remove).
- never substitute ingredients unless they are already listed on the ingredients listing.
- ensure that ingredient listings are correct and up-to-date.
- ensure that containers of similar looking ingredients (i.e. chocolate covered almonds) are clearly identified or colour coded to prevent the wrong ingredient from being "accidentally" used.

**For further information please contact the  
Dairy Plant Specialist at 604.707.2440**

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\* Information originally from the *Journal of Food Protection*, November 1998, pages 1522-1524.

