

Safeguards to protect your customers with allergies



According to a report published by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, **up to 6% of children and 4% of the total population** of the United States have some type of food allergy.¹ Plus, as our population continues to grow and get more diverse—and as new recipes and ingredients are introduced to our tables—we can expect food allergens to have an even greater impact in the future.



It is estimated that each year in the United States, anaphylaxis to food results in 30,000 emergency room visits, 2,000 hospitalizations, and 150 deaths.²

What's the risk to your business?

As a responsible member of our nation's food industry, you take pride in doing things right and in providing a quality product to your customers. However, if one of those customers has an allergic reaction to a meal served in your establishment—or to a food item picked from your shelves—your business's bottom line results and reputation could be in jeopardy. That's why all food service organizations should take steps to prevent incidents involving food allergens.

Foods that can cause an allergic reaction

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 90% of food allergies are caused by the following foods¹:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Tree nuts
- Peanuts
- Wheat
- Soybeans
- Sesame

Most common effects of an allergic reaction

Customer reactions to allergens may include:

- Hives
- Flushed skin or rash
- Tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth
- Face, tongue or lip swelling
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Coughing or wheezing
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Swelling of the throat and vocal cords
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness

How accidental allergic reactions can occur

Some of the most common causes of accidental allergic exposure include:

- Improper labeling of purchased products
- Improper labeling and storage of ingredients
- Improper handling of ingredients in the production of the food product
- Use of common equipment in production (carryover)
- Improper cleaning of equipment containing allergens
- Lack of understanding of the exposures to food allergens



All cookware should be properly washed, using a full cycle through the dishwasher or the three-step “wash, rinse, sanitize” sink wash process.

Some practical advice to keep customers safe

By adhering to these industry best practices, you can help to reduce the likelihood of a customer suffering an allergic reaction:

- Do not transfer food to a container that has not been adequately cleaned.
- Do not use tongs, spatulas, knives, ladles, or other utensils without washing them properly.
- In self-serve areas, keep all foods that have high risk of food allergens properly contained.
- Check labeling of products and ingredients for allergens and be familiar with their contents.
- Store foods with high risk of allergens separately from other foods.
- Train all employees on food allergen hazards.
- Place warnings regarding allergen-causing foods in your facility and on menus.
- Do not deep fry fish or shellfish in a common fryer with other foods. Have a separate fryer for those foods.
- Train employees to inform their manager if they discover they are serving a customer with a food allergy.
- Properly wash cookware using a full cycle through the dishwasher or the three-step “wash, rinse, sanitize” sink wash process. In addition, have a test kit available to test the sanitized water. Rinsing is not an adequate form of washing to remove allergen residue.
- Ensure full compliance with federal, state or local food-handling requirements.



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For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services at 1-866-808-2101 or [MyLossControlServices.com](https://www.MylowControlServices.com).

¹ Approaches to Establish Thresholds for Major Food Allergens and for Gluten in Food, The Threshold Group (2006), p 19.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture: ask.usda.gov/s/article/How-many-Americans-have-food-allergies

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