

# Food Allergies and Allergens

A food allergy is a medical condition in which exposure to a food triggers a harmful immune response. The immune response, called an allergic reaction, occurs because the immune system attacks proteins in the food that are normally harmless. The proteins that trigger the reaction are called allergens. There is no cure for a food allergy, in that absence, effective communication and avoidance of allergens are critical to minimizing risk of allergic reactions.

The symptoms of an allergic reaction to food range based on various factors but include: itchy mouth, hives, throat tightening, swelling, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty breathing and anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that is sudden in onset and can cause death.

Food allergies have been reported to affect up to 32 million Americans, including approximately 6 million children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that food allergies in children have increased by 50% between 1997 and 2011. More than 40% (2 in 5) of children with food allergies in the United States have been treated in the emergency department.

While more than 160 foods can cause allergic reactions in people with food allergies, the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act identified nine (9) most common ones identified as the Major Allergens:



**Peanuts**



**Crustaceans Shellfish**



**Eggs**



**Tree Nuts**



**Wheat**



**Fish**



**Milk**



**Soy**



**Sesame**

Requirements added with the 2022 Food Code:

## Food items packaged at retail:

- Food that is packaged for sale inside an establishment for sale to consumers must declare the major food allergens they contain, including sesame, on the label.

## Unpackaged foods:

- Unpackaged food served or sold to consumers within a retail food establishment must have written notification to consumers of the presence of major food allergens as an ingredient in the unpackaged food items.
  - Examples include: meals served in restaurants, cafés, takeaways and other eating-out venues.
  - Written notification can be provided in many forms such as: physical or electronic means, including, but not limited to, brochures, deli case or menu notifications, label statements, table tents, placards, or other effective written means.

## Bulk foods:

- Bulk Foods that are available for consumer self-dispensing need to be prominently labeled in plain view of the consumer with the name of the food sources from which the major food allergens are derived unless the food source is already part of the common or usual name of the ingredient.
  - Examples include: bakeries, butchers, deli counters, and salad bars.

## Employee food safety training programs:

- Training must include food allergy awareness of the nine (9) major food allergens and should consider developing operational specific allergen training programs for employees.