



THE VOICE OF FOOD RETAIL

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Food Allergens for Retailers

What are they?

Food allergens are food proteins that can initiate an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals.

Where do we find them?

Although over 160 different foods contain allergens, ninety percent of allergic reactions stem from the major allergens contained in the following eight foods: milk, eggs, fish, soybeans, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts and wheat.¹

How might I be exposed to food allergens?

Exposure to food allergens can occur through ingesting the food, inhalation (breathing in peanut dust), and dermal (using an allergen-containing skin care product).²

What are the health effects?

Allergic reactions stem from an immune response in which the body mistakenly identifies harmless food proteins as enemies and responds through the release of chemicals such as histamine. The released chemicals can lead to a range of conditions from itching and hives to life-threatening anaphylactic shock. These reactions may happen within minutes or they may not appear for several hours. To reduce the severity of a person's allergic reaction, epinephrine can be injected.³

What is being done?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates food allergens through the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA). FDA requires a food manufacturer to identify the major allergens on packaged food. FALCPA was designed to alert consumers to the presence of allergens in packaged food. Additionally, FDA recommends that allergen-sensitive consumers request ingredients when dining in restaurants and other venues in which the food being consumed is not labeled. To further protect consumers, FDA is conducting a risk assessment to establish regulatory thresholds for major food allergens as defined in FALCPA.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) contains requirements for the food industry, through the preventive controls rule, to prevent cross contact of allergen ingredients to non-allergen ingredients.

Additionally, the supplement to the 2009 FDA Food Code recommends that the "Person in Charge" in a retail food establishment is trained in food allergy awareness.⁴

What can Retailers do?

Retailers can educate employees to provide requested food ingredients and company best practices to allergen-sensitive consumers and their caregivers. Education is important as food allergies can sometimes be mistaken for intolerances, such as with lactose intolerance in which the body cannot properly process milk products—more common as we age and among certain ethnicities. Lactose intolerance symptoms are generally less severe than those of allergic reactions, such as gastrointestinal discomfort, and can often be mediated through lactase enzyme pills consumed with the dairy product.



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Summary:

Food allergens may invoke an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals. FDA protects public health through food allergen regulatory and guidance documents for the food industry, from production to consumption.

Referenced sources for food allergens:

¹<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm079311.htm>

² <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/foodAllergy/Documents/foodallergy.pdf>

³<http://www.foodallergy.org/about-food-allergies>

⁴http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm272584.htm#p2_c ha2

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