



Food Allergens: Know the Nine



Allergic reactions associated with the consumption of specific foods are a growing public health concern. It is estimated that 15 million people in the United States, including five percent of children, are affected by food allergies. Symptoms can range from a minor rash, hives, and swelling of the facial area to anaphylaxis, a life-threatening condition. Anaphylaxis can lead to constricted airways and a severe lowering of blood pressure and is estimated to result in 30,000 emergency room visits and 150 deaths in the United States annually.

While scientific advances in the treatment of food allergies continue to be made, no cure has been developed. To prevent serious adverse health outcomes, manufacturers must thoroughly clean equipment, prevent cross-contact, and clearly label allergen containing foods.



The Major Food Allergens

There are many types of foods that cause allergic reactions. In the United States, two laws specify nine which require special labeling on consumer containers. The Food Allergen Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA) identifies eight foods, including: **milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans**. The Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act was signed into law in 2021 and adds **sesame** as a major food allergen, effective January 1, 2023.

Manufacturing Requirements

All food manufacturers must establish and maintain effective allergen control procedures, policies, and practices. Separate foods and ingredients containing allergens from those without allergens by:

- thoroughly cleaning common equipment between uses
- maintaining adequate distance between exposed products
- using physical barriers or splash guards
- sourcing raw materials from approved vendors
- protecting food packaging from cross-contact
- ensuring employees wear clean outer garments in production areas



Food Allergen Labeling Requirements

All food manufacturers must clearly identify the source names of all major food allergens used as an ingredient in their products. The common names must appear on the label of any packaged food, either:

- 1) In parentheses following the name in the list of ingredients.

Example: “flour (wheat), lecithin (soy), whey (milk), tahini (sesame)”

or,

- 2) Immediately after or next to the list of ingredients in a “contains” statement.

Example: “Contains wheat, soy, milk, sesame.”

Food manufacturers may use advisory statements (e.g., “may contain...”, “product manufactured in a facility that also handles...”, etc.) on their labels to provide supplemental information to their customers. However, such statements cannot be used as a substitute for implementing good manufacturing practices, allergen controls, and other labeling requirements under FALCPA and applicable statutes.



For additional information about allergen controls, food safety topics, and training opportunities for registered food manufacturers, please visit our website or email FDBTraining@cdph.ca.gov.