

MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES

According to a 2008 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1 in 26 children now has a food allergy, that's 3 million children.

The eight major allergenic foods and food groups are: milk, eggs, fish, Crustacean shellfish, tree nuts and peanuts, wheat or soybeans. 90% of all allergic reactions are due to the consumption of one of these listed foods. Food allergies are a growing area of concern because their reactions can be potentially life threatening.

A true food allergy involves the immune system while a food intolerance is due problems digesting or tolerating a food. Lactose intolerance occurs when an individual can't fully digest milk products because they lack the digest enzyme, lactase. Signs of an intolerance (gas, bloating and stomach cramps) may be uncomfortable but they are not life threatening. On the other hand, the symptoms of a food allergy can begin mild in the form itching or redness around the lips and progress to a severe reaction with difficulty breathing, coughing, vomiting and loss of consciousness.

Addressing the needs of clients and customers with food allergies is a matter of food safety. Currently, protecting your facility from food borne illness is a high priority and so too should protecting your clients who have food allergies. This involves all aspects of your operation from talking with your suppliers, reviewing your menus, educating your staff and clearly labeling foods that contain allergens. Even minute quantities of the allergen can pose a serious health risk for the allergic individual. Parents and children can be particularly vocal when it comes to menu items and recommending changes. It's important for parents to inform the school if their child has an allergy and if possible provide a list of safe and unsafe foods. A team approach works best when there is a child at risk.

Allergy causing ingredients are sometimes hiding in foods – always check the label and ask the supplier. If you have questions about any of our products please don't hesitate to drop me a line at ifordham@goodsource.com

References:

Get the facts: New food allergen labeling laws. Retrieved on 03/10/09 – www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/facts/foodallergenfactsheet.pdf

Food Allergies: challenges and opportunities for food service. Retrieved on 03/10/09 – www.ciaprochef.com/foodallergies/what_are_food_allergies.html