

Helping Reduce Exposure to Allergens in the Kitchen Setting

In many of the same ways that pathogens can contaminate foods and surfaces, allergens can also contaminate the kitchen atmosphere and may pose a risk to those with severe allergies. Poor food handling habits may increase the risk of cross-contamination of food with pathogens and allergens.

Allergen Contamination:

Kitchen and service staff also need to be aware of the risks of introducing allergen contamination. Like cross-contamination, allergen contamination happens when food isn't kept properly separated and covered.

Some of the ways this could happen are:

- Using equipment that hasn't been thoroughly cleaned and still has residue of other food on it
- Contaminating (adulteration) of food, whether on purpose or by accident
- Using rework materials, like using pastry dough for two different recipes, that may have come in contact with an allergen
- Using the wrong packages or wrong labels
- Not identifying all ingredients in food received from a supplier
- Using misleading names for foods or ingredients For example, "Bombay Duck" is actually a type of fish
- Carrying too many plates at one time, causing food on separate plates to touch
- Touching different types of food without handwashing in between

Cross Contamination can occur in the following ways:

- Food to food: raw food or juices with allergens coming in contact with ready to eat foods that do not contain allergens
- Equipment to food : the same equipment is used with raw and ready to eat food containing allergens and then used to prepare food without allergens without proper cleaning between uses
- People to food: hands that have touched food containing an allergen and then touched a ready to eat food that was allergen free without washing hands in between

The following tips will help reduce the risk of cross-contaminating foods that contain allergens with those that should be free of allergens:

- Separate foods: keep known allergens in covered containers and away from other foods
- If you are dispensing food from a large bulk container always use a clean utensil (ie. Mayo if you double dip you may introduce allergens into a food that may not otherwise contain them)
- Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces between uses, especially if you are preparing food for someone who has alerted you that they have a food allergy. Keep in mind that thorough cleaning is likely to remove the allergen. Sanitizing only kills pathogens, but does not remove allergens
- Avoid using a common cleaning cloth when cleaning a surface to remove allergens, use a new cloth or a disposable cleaning cloth to ensure allergens are not moved around by the cloth
- Equipment and utensils must be in good condition (ie. Free of cracks) freshly washed and sanitized and checked for residue prior to use
- Hand hygiene is extremely important – wash hands between handling raw and prepared foods and after handling a food that contains a known allergen and before handling foods that are known to be allergen free
- Glove use is not recommended: In many cases, gloves are not changed often enough. Food handlers must still wash their hands before putting on gloves and after removing them. When gloves are worn the food handler cannot feel dirt or food residue on their hands and may cross-contaminate food or food surfaces with pathogens and/or allergens



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