

Family Child Care Food Allergy Fact Sheets



Reading Food Labels for Food Allergens

Reading the ingredients lists on food labels for food allergens is the first step in protecting children with food allergies. This fact sheet will discuss how to find food allergens on a food label. Although there are over 170 foods that can cause food allergies, nine major food allergens account for about 90% of all food-allergic reactions in the United States.

What are the laws and regulations for labeling food allergens?

In 2006, the *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA)* became effective. This Federal law requires that food manufacturers identify the original eight major food allergens (crustacean shellfish, egg, fish, milk, peanuts, soy, tree nuts, and wheat) in plain language in the ingredient list on the food label.

In 2021, the *Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act (FASTER)* was passed into law. This act adds sesame as the ninth major allergen. This law took effect on January 1, 2023. Contact the food manufacturer if there is any uncertainty about a food containing sesame.


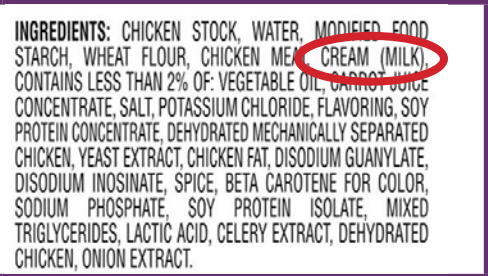

Nine Major Allergens		
Crustacean shellfish*	Milk	Soy
Egg	Peanuts	Tree nuts
Fish	Sesame	Wheat

*Mollusk shellfish are not considered as a major allergen by *FALCPA*, so all the ingredient information for mollusks may not be on the label.



How are food allergens written on a food label?

FALCPA specifies where and how allergen information is presented in the ingredient list on the food label. The allergenic food ingredient **MUST** be written in one of three ways.

<p>1. Written as the common or usual name of the major food allergen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example: “wheat flour” 	
<p>2. In parenthesis following the ingredient that is not the common name</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example: “cream (milk)” 	
<p>3. Listed after the ingredient list in a “Contains” statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example: “Contains: wheat and soy” 	

FALCPA requires more information in the ingredient list for some of the major allergens. Manufacturers are required to list the following for tree nuts, fish, and crustacean shellfish.

- Specific tree nut (such as almond, pecan, walnut)
- Species of fish (such as tilapia, salmon, tuna)
- Species of crustacean shellfish (such as crab, shrimp, lobster)

What are advisory statements for food allergy labeling?

Food manufacturers may include an advisory statement when there is a chance that a food product could contain an allergen. An advisory statement is NOT covered in the *FALCPA* so it varies widely from manufacturer to manufacturer. Some common types of advisory statements include the “May Contain,” “Made on Equipment,” and “Processed in Facilities” statements. According to the Food Allergy Research Education (FARE) organization, products labeled with advisory statement are not safe for people with known food allergies.

“May Contain” statement

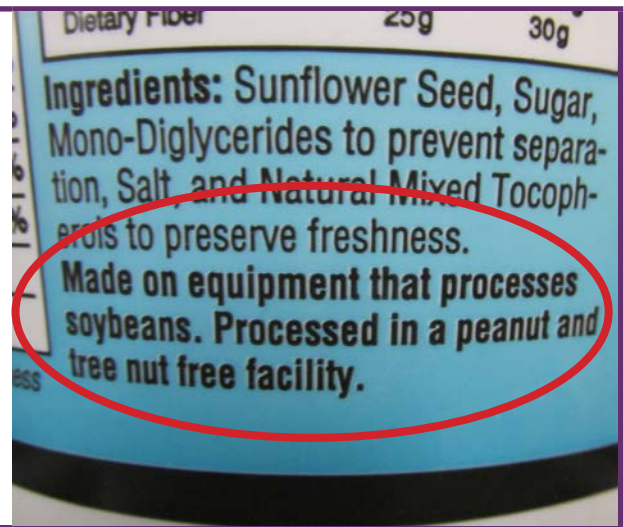
- Example: “May contain traces of peanuts”

“Made on Equipment”

- Example: “Made on equipment that makes products containing eggs and tree nuts”

“Processed in Facilities”

- Example: “Processed in facilities that also process wheat”



What are some other food label terms to be aware of when looking for food allergens?

Terms on the label such as “dairy-free,” “peanut-free,” or “egg-free” are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are not covered in *FALCPA*. These items could still contain the allergen through means such as cross-contact, the accidental transfer of allergens to an allergen-free food or surface. Contact the food manufacturer to ensure whether or not the allergen could be present in the food.

The term “gluten-free” is regulated by the FDA. However, when checking the ingredient list for a child with a wheat allergy, family child care providers should check the label for “wheat” not “gluten” as other parts of the wheat plant could be used in the food. “Gluten-free” is not the same thing as “wheat-free.”

How often should family child care providers read food labels?

Always read the food label for allergens before purchasing food at the store. Food manufacturers may change the recipe of a food item. Carefully read all ingredient lists every time a food item is purchased. Do not rely on the last time the item was purchased or what is on the food manufacturer's website for allergen information as it may not be up to date. For additional questions about the ingredient list on a food label, contact the food manufacturer.

How should family child care providers manage food labels?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends maintaining food labels of all products served for 24 hours as a precaution. Doing so ensures the label is available if a child has an allergic reaction. Unlike a foodborne illness outbreak where the outbreak can occur days after a food is served, an allergic reaction will happen the day the food is served. If food is served as leftovers or reused in another recipe, the food label should be kept until all of the food is either eaten or thrown away. Some ways to hold the labels include keeping the actual labels in a certain place, taking a picture of the label, or scanning the label.



References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *Voluntary guidelines for managing food allergies in schools and early care and education programs*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/index.htm>
- Food Allergy Research & Education. (2020). *Understanding food labels*.
<https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/how-read-food-label>
- Food Allergy Research & Education. (2021). *With the stroke of President Biden's pen, FASTER Act for sesame labeling becomes law*.
<https://www.foodallergy.org/media-room/stroke-president-bidens-pen-faster-act-sesame-labeling-becomes-law>
- Food Allergy Research & Education. (n.d.). *How to read a food label*.
<https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/how-read-food-label>
- Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources Food Allergy Research and Resource Program. (n.d.). *Dairy-free and non-dairy?*
<https://farrp.unl.edu/resources/gi-fas/opinion-and-summaries/dairy-free-and-non-dairy>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. (2018, October 29). *Food allergy*. <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/food-allergy>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2018, July 16). *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA)*.
<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/Allergens/ucm106187.htm>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2018, July 16). *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 questions and answers*.
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-allergensgluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/food-allergen-labeling-and-consumer-protection-act-2004-questions-and-answers>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2018, September 20). *Guidance for industry: Questions and answers regarding food allergens (Edition 4)*.
<https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-questions-and-answers-regarding-food-allergens-edition-4>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2020, November 10). *Food allergens/gluten-free guidance documents & regulatory information*.
<https://www.fda.gov/food/guidance-documents-regulatory-information-topic-food-and-dietary-supplements/food-allergensgluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2021, May 5). *Food allergies*.

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>

U.S. Library of Congress. (2021). *Summary: S.578 — FASTER Act of 2021*.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/578?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22S.+578%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1>

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA employer.

For more information and the nondiscrimination statement in other languages:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights/usda-nondiscrimination-statement-other-fns-programs>

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

Suggested Reference Citation:

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2024). *Family child care food allergy fact sheets – Reading food labels for food allergens*. University, MS: Author.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by the University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The university cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images. Please contact helpdesk@theicn.org for more information.

© 2024, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

10/11/2024