

Family Child Care Food Allergy Fact Sheets



Avoiding Cross-Contact – Preparing Allergen-Free Food Safely

When preparing food for a child with food allergies, it is important to do it safely so allergens do not accidentally get into the food—also known as cross-contact. This fact sheet will discuss cross-contact, how it is caused, and how to prevent it in family child care.

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact is when an allergen is accidentally transferred from a food with an allergen to a food or surface that does not have an allergen. The term cross-contact is often used interchangeably with cross-contamination, but the terms mean different things. The following chart shows the difference between the two terms.



Cross-Contact	Cross-Contamination
Definition: Accidental transfer of allergens to a food or surface	Definition: Accidental transfer of microorganisms to a food or surface
Cooking does not reduce or eliminate the allergen protein.	Cooking does reduce or eliminate the microorganism.
Removed from a surface by soap, water, and friction only.	Removed from a surface by washing, rinsing, and sanitizing .
Example: A knife is used to spread peanut butter for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Then, the same knife is used to cut a turkey sandwich without cleaning, rinsing, and sanitizing the knife between uses.	Example: Raw meat is cut on a cutting board. Then, fresh vegetables for the salad bar are chopped on the same cutting board without cleaning, rinsing, and sanitizing the board between uses.

What are possible sources of cross-contact?

Cross-contact can happen during any part of handling food from buying through serving. Care must be taken to keep allergen-free food away from foods that contain allergens. The following are some possible sources of cross-contact.

- Food mixing during preparation
- Insufficient handwashing allowing allergens to remain on hands
- Insufficient cleaning allowing allergens to remain on food contact surfaces such as counters
- Shared equipment, utensils, and cutting boards not being cleaned properly between uses
- Cooking food splattering into an allergen-free food
- Steam from cooking getting into an allergen-free food
- Family style dining where a child accidentally uses a utensil for multiple foods

What are ways to avoid cross-contact?

Storing, preparing, and serving food in a way that prevents cross-contact can reduce the risk of exposing a child to a food allergen. The following are ways family child care providers can prevent cross-contact.

Storage

- Have shelves in the dry storage, refrigerator, and freezer that are only for allergen-free foods. Best practice is to use the top shelf so nothing can fall on the food (for example, wheat flour falling on brown rice flour).

Preparation

- Wash hands before preparing allergy-free foods.
- Wear single-use gloves.
- Use a clean apron, potholders, and oven mitts when preparing allergy-free foods to prevent cross-contact.
- Wash all utensils, equipment, and food contact surfaces before and after each use with hot, soapy water making sure to scrub, then rinse and sanitize them.
- Prepare food items that do not contain allergens first. Cover, label, and store the allergy-free items separately.
- Designate an allergy-free zone in the kitchen if possible. When working with multiple food allergies, set up procedures to prevent cross-contact within the allergy-free zone.

Serving

- Have children wash their hands before and after each meal.
- Serve the child with food allergies first, if possible.
- Take extra care with serving utensils and serving containers to prevent cross-contact. An adult should always be present during meals.
- Do not allow children to share food or eating utensils.
- Do not allow children to take food or beverages away from the table.

Family child care providers should think through their foodservice process and add ways to prevent cross-contact.

What if meals are served family style?

Cross-contact is possible during family style meal service. Take steps to ensure a child with allergies cannot access foods that can cause allergic reactions. For infants, position high chairs far enough apart so that one child cannot touch the tray of another child. For toddlers and preschoolers, seat children with allergies next to an adult to allow supervision during the meal. It is also helpful to seat the child at the head of the table where it is more difficult to reach the communal bowls. Label all allergy-safe foods and have the allergic child take the foods they can eat from the regular menu before all other children to prevent cross-contact.



Are there ways other than meals or snacks that a child could be exposed to a food allergen?

Items for art projects or crafts can sometimes contain food allergens, for example, play dough contains wheat. Food allergens may also be present in some household products like soaps and lotions. It is important to read labels for allergens and prevent a child with allergies from being exposed to any products that contain allergens. Foods for parties or rewards could also contain an allergen. Anyone entering the family child care could bring food that contains the allergen or have the allergen on their hands. Determine what policies need to be in place to help avoid exposure to food allergens.

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). *Your food allergy field guide*.
<https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/field-guide-english>
- Institute of Child Nutrition. (2016, December). *Serving safe food to students with food allergies (Sample SOP)*. <https://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. (2018, October 19). *Guidelines for the diagnosis and management of food allergy frequently asked questions*.
<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/food-allergy-guidelines-faq>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Finding a path to safety in food allergy: Assessment of the global burden, causes, prevention, management, and public policy*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/23658.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017, June 22). *Modifications to accommodate disabilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program*.
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/modifications-accommodate-disabilities-cacfp-and-sfsp>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2019, December 13). *Food code 2017*.
<https://www.fda.gov/food/fda-food-code/food-code-2017>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2021, May 5). *Food allergies*.
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>

For More Information

Food Allergy Research & Education
www.foodallergy.org

Institute of Child Nutrition
www.theicn.org/foodsafety

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Food Allergens
www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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

For the nondiscrimination statement in other languages:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cr/fns-nondiscrimination-statement>

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. (2022). *Family child care food allergy fact sheets – Avoiding cross-contact – Preparing allergen-free food safely*. 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.

© 2022, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

03/01/2022

