

What is Cross Contact?

Cross contact is the unplanned presence of food allergens. It occurs when an allergen protein is unintentionally transferred to an allergen free food or object. Cross contact can be invisible to the eye and can come from many places. Even small amounts of an allergen can cause an allergic reaction.

This means that your child can accidentally be exposed to an allergen through:

Objects (Utensils, cooking surfaces, highchairs, pacifiers, sponges, bib, apron, etc.)

- Using the same tongs to flip shrimp and a chicken breast. Without properly washing the tongs in-between use, allergens may be transferred to the chicken breast.

Food (Steam, splatter, accidental contact, frying oil)

- Removing nuts from a salad or scraping cheese off a cheeseburger. It is important to avoid these types of short cuts.

Saliva (People, pets, binky, suck toy, musical instrument, etc.)

- Sucking on another baby's pacifier after they had a bottle of milk-based formula.



Cross Contamination vs Cross Contact

Cross contamination occurs when microorganisms such as bacteria contaminate food and result in a food borne illness. Unlike cross contact, the risks of cross contamination may be eliminated with proper cooking techniques, whereas proper cooking does not reduce or eliminate the chances of a food allergy reaction.

Who needs to know about allergen cross contact?

Any caregiver for your child. Babysitters, siblings, grandparents, extended family, friends, teachers, etc.

Routine teaching of all caregivers about sources of cross contact and prevention of exposure is essential.



Children explore their environments with their hands and often put them, or other objects in their mouths.

Younger children are more likely to put their hands in their mouths and noses; therefore, caregivers should have increased awareness and wash their children's hands often. Avoid sharing of food, utensils, water bottles and anything else that may go in their mouth, such as musical instruments.

Tips for Preventing Cross Contact When Serving and Preparing Food



Preparing

- Wash your hands with soap and water after coming into contact with any allergens.
- Talk to anyone who serves or prepares food for your child as they need to understand the concepts of cross contact.
- Keep allergen free foods away from other foods while they are being stored in the refrigerator or pantry.

- Do not allow children with a food allergy to share food, drinks, plate, cups, or utensils.
- Saliva, whether from a person or a pet is another source of cross contact.
- When grocery shopping store problematic foods in a bag in your cart.
- Avoid foods in bulk bins, the deli counter, and hot and cold salad bars as these are common sights for cross contact.

Cooking

- If possible, prepare allergen-free foods first and then prepare food for the rest of the family.
- Use separate utensils and serving spoons
- Allergens cannot be destroyed by cooking, frying or freezing. Avoid foods prepared on surfaces that cannot be cleaned in-between us.
- Fried Foods (fryolators), deli slicer, seasoned wok, common grill surface.



Cleaning

- Carefully wash contact items and surfaces with soap and water or in the dishwasher before and after each use.
- Dishware, utensils, pots, pans, cutting boards, counter tops, tables, highchairs.
- Wipe down tables, highchairs, toys, pacifiers, menus, salt/pepper shakers or any other item your child could touch with their hands or put in their mouths.
- Consider carrying wipes with you and try not to rely on hand sanitizer products as they don't fully remove food particles.

Keep it simple, limit multiple ingredient dishes, cook from scratch.

Source	Examples	Ways to Avoid
Objects		
Kitchen Utensils, Serving Spoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a knife to spread peanut butter, not cleaning it properly, and then using it to spread jam. Serving mac and cheese, and then using the same spoon to serve green beans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash utensils and serving spoons in the dishwasher or with soap and water in between each use. Use separate sets of serving spoons during meal time for allergen vs non-allergen food items.
Cooking Surfaces, Cutting Boards, Counter Tops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooking fish or shellfish on the same grill then cooking steak. Scrambling eggs and then cooking a grilled cheese on same griddle. Cutting cheese and then fresh fruit on the same cutting board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean grill surface with soap and water in between uses. Prepare the allergic child's food first. Consider having separate cooking surfaces and cutting boards as allergen-safe. Clean counters with soap and water or commercial wipes before and after cooking.
Deep Fryers, Cooking Oils, and Seasoned Wok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> French fries that have been fried in the same oil as shrimp. Cooking allergen safe foods in a seasoned wok. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid food cooked in a common fryolator Consider simple dishes cooked on surfaces that are easily cleaned.
Pots, Pans, Cooling Racks, Small Appliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making wheat bread in a bread pan, and then making gluten free bread. Blending a smoothie with cow's milk, and then one with plant-based milk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider cleaning properly in-between uses or designate specific pans and small appliances as allergen-free only if necessary. Consider cooking the allergy-safe foods first.
Saliva		
Saliva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kissing your child or cleaning their binky with your mouth after you eat a granola bar with allergens. Sharing toys, teething rings, pacifiers with other infants. Sharing utensils, cups, plates, water bottles, food, or drinks. Pets eat treats with milk and then lick child's face, or babies eating dog food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not share food, drinks, cups, plates or eating utensils. Wash properly or wipe down toys, pacifiers, teething rings regularly. Keep pet food and treats out of reach of children.
Food		
Steam, or powdered form of foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steam from cooking allergens, such as shellfish in a pot on the stove. Boiling or steaming milk and inhaling the steam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that cooking can put allergen protein in the air.
Hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failing to wash your hands after handling nuts, and then preparing your child's meal, or setting them up in their highchair. Siblings playing with a toy after eating allergen, and then handing it to allergic child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash hands with warm water and soap before and after preparing each meal and setting up highchair. Regularly wipe down toys to decrease risk of exposure from child to child.
Sponges, Dish Towels, Oven Mitts, Aprons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used a sponge to clean a mac and cheese baking pan, and then the child's sippy cup. Wiping hands on apron instead of washing them in between each task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering using disposable wipes, or paper towels, or designating specific cleaning instruments for allergen free cookware, and dinnerware. Wash hands properly in-between tasks.
Crumbs, Floor Dust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dusting your hands off after eating tree nuts, roasted peanuts, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage handwashing before and after eating. Consider confining food consumption only to the kitchen and dining areas.
Condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double-dipping: Dipping a tortilla chip into queso, and then into guacamole. Using a knife to get peanut butter out of a jar, not cleaning it properly, and then using it to get jam out of jar. Adding tahini to your child's rice bowl that has a sesame allergy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When available provide each member of the family with their own bowl. Consider choosing squeeze bottles to eliminate this type of double-dipping. Always read the label and be on the look out for hidden ingredients.
Pantry Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storing nuts on the same shelf as Puffs. Storing wheat bread on top of gluten free bread in a bread box. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicate a shelf or separate location for allergen foods whether in the refrigerator, or pantry to avoid confusion.