News Release  
For Immediate Release  

Detect Food Allergens to Protect against Life-Threatening Events

Annually, over a million people in the United States will have either mild to life-threatening allergic reactions after eating a food to which he or she is allergic. This is known as a “food allergen.” The appearance of symptoms (flushed skin or rash; itchy area around mouth; swelling of lips, tongue, and face; hives; vomiting or other gastric distress; coughing; wheezing; dizziness; swelling of the throat and vocal cords; difficulty breathing; and loss of consciousness) after eating food may be a sign of a food allergy.

What should you do to protect yourself against having a food allergy? First of all, avoid foods that can cause a reaction. In case a food allergen is accidentally eaten, those who have food allergies must recognize the early symptoms of an allergic reaction and be educated about how to treat the allergic reaction. They should follow the directions of their health care provider; start treatment as advised by their physician, and go immediately to the emergency room.

Since January 2006, the Food and Drug Administration has required that the eight most common food allergens (crustacean shellfish, eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, soybeans, tree nuts, and wheat) be noted on the food label. These foods account for 90 percent of food allergic reactions, and they are the food sources from which many other ingredients are derived. Those who have a food allergy should learn to read food labels and avoid the offending foods.

How will a person be able to tell by reading the ingredients listing if one of the eight common food allergens are present in the food? First, look at the ingredients’ common name to see if it is listed in the ingredient’s list. Note that the food allergen name must appear in either of two ways:

• in parentheses after the ingredient name such as “flour (wheat),” “sole (fish),” “whey (milk),” and “lecithin (soy);” or
• immediately after or next to the list of ingredients in a “contains” statement such as “Contains wheat, fish, milk, and soy.”

Now it is easier for consumers who have food allergies to find information on food labels that will help them avoid certain foods. To learn more about food allergens, you can visit the Food and Drug Administration website at: http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/wh-alrgy.html.

Contact ______________________, Texas AgriLife Extension Service ______________  
County agent at ________________, for more information.

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