

Best Practices for Dealing with Food Allergies

Most camps have seen an increase in campers and staff that suffer from a variety of food allergies. We have included some best practices for dealing with food allergies.



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What to do when your orders have arrived:

1. Check each item every time you open a case. Warnings on the outside of case boxes are not always accurate and can be used for multiple products.
2. We suggest that you check an item from each case when multiple cases are ordered to ensure that they are consistent throughout.
3. Do not assume a product is okay to use because you have used it previously, even at an earlier part of the season. Labels can and will change without notice.
4. Online nutritional information will assist you in the process of determining a product's ingredients, but you still must check the individual packaging when the product arrives to confirm that this information is still accurate. Websites are not updated consistently, causing discrepancies in the labeling.

Systems to assist in serving your allergy population:

1. **Allergy Kitchen:**
Create a separate "Kitchen" or cooking area for allergy meals. This would require separate equipment including refrigerators, ovens, sinks, etc. Assign a specific staff person to oversee this area to limit any cross contamination.
2. **Allergy Smallwares:**
Use color coded pots, pans, knives, cutting boards, etc. that are clearly marked for use with specific food.
3. **Disposables:**
Use disposable plates, utensils, etc. to limit the risk of cross contamination. Some camps color code plates to assist campers/staff in knowing which meals they can eat based on specific allergies.

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4. Allergy Binder:

Create allergy profiles for each camper/staff. Profiles include all necessary allergy information as well as a recent picture. Pictures allow the staff person who is handing out the meal to confirm that they are providing the correct meal to the correct person.

5. Allergy Liaison:

Use a specific staff person that assists all campers/staff with meals. It is important to have a consistent person who is there daily. In addition to helping answer questions, the allergy liaison will be the intermediary between the kitchen staff and person(s) with allergy concerns.

Equipment Concerns and Issues

Many camps have created “allergy” kitchens or areas in their kitchen’s to accommodate the allergy preparation and cooking in addition to limiting access to what food camper/staff eat at camp. While food selection is one aspect of the process of catering to allergies, overall awareness of cross contamination is essential as well. The use of equipment such as ovens, fryers, tilt skillet, etc for multiple types of food increase the potential risk of a cross-contamination. For example, if you are making mozzarella sticks in your fryer, you would not be able to use that fryer for your dairy or gluten free campers/staff.

This would also be the case for shared refrigerator, freezers, microwaves, etc. It is important to review the needs of your food allergy community prior to their arrival at camp. It is also a good practice to have the campers and their families, review their needs and when possible tour the kitchen area to make sure they are comfortable with the systems you have in place. 

