

# News Release

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Food Allergy Awareness, Prevention Ahead of Summer Fun** *Allergist Explains Food Allergies, Treatments*

Before you head out the door to join your friends and family at a cookout or drop off your kiddo at camp, make sure you have communicated any food allergies to ensure precautions are taken by those preparing food. Although reactions can be mild, some are life-threatening, but they all can be avoided with being aware and preparing in advance.

“Food allergies are a reaction to an immune response directed against certain proteins in food,” explained James Tarbox, M.D., Texas Tech Physicians allergist. “Nine of the most common food allergies that make up about 90% of the reactions people have are to milk, eggs, wheat, soy, tree nut, peanuts, fish and shellfish. Sesame was recently added in 2023.”

Reactions range from mild symptoms such as hives and lip swelling, to severe, life-threatening symptoms which sometimes involve fatal respiratory problems and shock. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), almost 6% of U.S. adults and children have a food allergy, though they can appear at any age.

There is no cure for food allergies. Although some people outgrow their allergies, others may have been misdiagnosed. The best way to avoid a food allergy reaction is prevention, including taking precautions not to cross-contaminate food by using different utensils, pans or dishes. If someone is eating out and has a medical ID card, they can have the server hand it to the chef so the chef is aware.

“That goes back to knowing what the history is with the food allergy,” Tarbox said. “The person with the allergy should be very aware of what’s going into their foods and make sure that whoever is preparing it knows the precautions to take, as well as not to cross contaminate the food. If it’s a child with food allergies going off to camp, make sure everyone is aware of what they’re allergic to and that they have their medication to treat a reaction.”

Tarbox noted that there is a difference between having a food allergy and food intolerance.

“Food allergies can have a broad reaction,” Tarbox continued. “They can be mild with a localized skin rash, or they can have more severe reactions such as wheezing, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, a drop in blood pressure and seizures. Food intolerances, are usually related to digestion of foods with enzymes and breaking the food down. Those tend to be more localized and milder and related to the GI tract.”

If the symptoms point to a food allergy reaction, how it's treated depends on the severity.

“If it's a rash or hives, you could probably treat it with antihistamines, but if it's a more severe reaction, it's really important to understand how to use an epinephrine auto injector,” Tarbox said. “If someone uses an epinephrine injection, they have to make sure they leave it in long enough for the proper dosage.”

Tarbox added, “There are a number of new therapies that are coming out to potentially prevent or treat food allergy. Omalizumab, or Xolair, which has been around for quite a while to treat asthma and chronic hives, was approved in February to lessen reactions to food allergy.”

Those with food allergies might soon have more options for treatment: A patch for peanut allergy, which would be especially useful in infants and young children and a nasal form of epinephrine for those who are needle adverse.