



Season 1 Episode 6—Food Safety During Holidays

October 8, 2026

(Intro with music) This is *Food Defender* podcast with Dr. Terence Martin, food safety and quality specialist at Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University. Our *Food Defender* podcast covers everything that comes to food safety. For example, USDA guidelines, FDA guidelines, and just general consumer safety as it pertains to food.

Terence Martin

Well, welcome back to another episode of *Food Defenders*. Episode number six with the *Food Defenders*. With the holidays coming up we decided we want to talk about holidays. When it comes to food safety based around food allergens. I think a lot of times we don't take in consideration about the risks that may come.

Terence Martin

Food safety besides the regular norm, food safety, time and temperature of your product. But what we're going to discuss today on *Food Defenders*, we're going to talk about food allergies, that that may be a risk during your holiday activities such as office parties, family party gatherings or just gathering as a whole.

There is no specific percentage of when it comes to allergy and food allergy cases during the winter holidays like Christmas, you know, study shows, has significant spikes in peanut and tree nut induced inflections in children's. More so during holiday Halloween, probably due to the Halloween candies that

may have nuts in it. Like 85% increase for peanuts during the Halloween that has been in the studies been shown in that Easter increase due to peanuts as well compared to the rest of the year.

Terence Martin

So, you can see there's not no great rise in allergens during the Christmas holidays or the winter months compared to like, Halloween and Easter. But still, we want to make sure that we highlight those possibilities in those risks. When it comes to food allergies during the holidays, you know, research has found those similar increase in flocks cases during Christmas.

To kind of shows that there's no big increase. One of the biggest things we really want to talk about during the holidays is the high risk. During the holidays, it is our children who may be more a little bit susceptible of these allergens during the holidays.

Which was previously mentioned, like Halloween and maybe Easter, but we want to navigate our holiday food safety and look at allergens. Meaning biggest part of the early communication. When you are having events, are you going to events? The communication about allergens is very important.

Terence Martin

I would do my due diligence if I would have a allergy allergic to allergen like peanuts, and those type of things. Communicate with the host. Make sure you read the labels.

Of the ingredients that may be encompassing like potluck, or tell your host that I may have some type of allergens prior to going to a holiday event, or even if you're doing a holiday event like Christmas event for your your own family and friends as the the guest, is there any evidence that we need to know about while preparing our meals for for the holidays?

I would also make sure when preparing those holiday meals taking consideration, be very precautions about cross-contamination, making sure no allergens like utensils or whatever. Make sure they're clean and separated when it comes to cross-contamination with allergen when it comes. One of the other things that I would recommend during the holidays, if you may be concerned about allies and someone having a allergen, is maybe have a EpiPen kit on deck at your event just in case someone has a attack from a allergen.

Terence Martin

That way you taking all precautions. When it comes to trying to protect those that may have have allergen. You know, the general population in the United States is about 4% adults and 8% children with food allergens. So that's a pretty good number taking consideration when you're doing having holiday events or going to holiday events that where someone could actually have a reaction to a allergen, that's that's in the product.

Terence Martin

You know, some of the pitfalls that you may come across a lot of times during the holiday potluck, office parties or going is. Those hidden allergens that may be in baked goods, you know, like eggs or some, you know, allergens and sauces. And a lot of times you have these open buffets where people serve themselves. Well, you don't know what may be in that product when you have it on the table. And, there may be Dairy or soy or wheat or even nuts that may be in some of those products that may be a self-serve, such as a potluck at an office party or a holiday event.

So, you want to be precautious and communicate early on. As I said before, you know, if you are allergic to stuff, you know you're going to event. I would recommend that you inform the host of your specific allergens prior to going and in advance, and actually ask for about ingredients and plan dishes that that may be at the event that you may be attending, as well as you may want to bring your own food, that you know, that you have been prepared yourself or someone that has prepared without those known allergens is a good tip to as well.

Terence Martin

To have your own dish or safe snacks to help you out. Or if you get to a event and you have.

Labels still on products, you may want to take a quick glance when you get there to read the label on the ingredient label to make sure you don't have any allergen presence in that. That product will be the biggest thing you want to do is have a good time at your holiday events, and make sure you don't have an episode from a allergen reaction, something that could be possibly avoided doing during the holidays.

Make sure if you do have allergens and if you know for a fact that you have allergies, if you have an EpiPen or. On hand, or maybe make sure you your host may have one on hand as well, just in case someone do have a reaction that you do have something like a pen already on deck. It can be kind of tricky during the holidays through the excitement.

Through the excitement of. The holidays and seeing new people and old friends and family members that. You forget to be do your due diligence to do the necessary things. When it comes to making sure there's no allergens there with anything, I always say communication. Communication is a is key to avoiding allergens. When you do events, whether it be the holidays or even. We talked about tailgating back in September and when we were talking about going. So communication is key if you know you have a known allergen is communicating in advance.

Terence Martin

And as well, when you get there to the event to share with the host that you do have a allergen. That way you could be mindful of what to look for and what not to consume when you at these holiday events. And if you're bringing children that may have high allergens. Also, make sure you communicate that with your host and your child as you take them to the holiday events that, hey, you know you can't eat that.

Remind your children that you can't eat, for example, a nutty bar that may have nuts in it because they have a nut allergen. So you want to communicate that with your your kids. If you go into holiday events that, hey,

you remember you can't consume this as well, that communication prior to going to a holiday event because we know with our children, they they tend to see what other children are doing.

If they consume it and first thing they will, I'm going to try it. And next thing you know, they may have a reaction that may ruin your holiday event, that may be at the emergency room, and no one wants that to happen during a holiday events with you, friends and family. You don't want to have that that type of emergency. One of the biggest thing is.

Terence Martin

Also teaching your kids that may have allergy. A tip is to teach a child how to be role play, maybe role play with your child prior to going to event teach to teach them how to be politely decline. You know, someone offers the, you know, some food that may have allergens and play role play prior to going to events saying, okay, you know, politely said, you know, I don't want to I have a allergen.

I can't consume that. Not just I don't want to eat it because some people may get offended that you don't want to eat their food. So you can role play prior to going to an event, a family event or holiday event with your child and kind of show them how to politely decline a food item that may have a allergen in it.

Terence Martin

So it's very important that everyone communicates when based around allergen. Always be prepared. So when an example when it comes to your kid, you know, being politely.

And you could say, okay, if everybody's having ice ice cream and cake, you can have your kid to say, you know, if someone offers ice cream, they know they allergic to dairy. They your kid can politely say, you know, I dairy not really works well with me. I prefer not to have dairy with my ice, with my cake.

Just just the mannerism of just educating your kid and telling them, saying, hey, you know, I don't do well with dairy. Politely, I could just consume the cake in and not the ice cream itself. It's all about communicating, for example, being polite, not just saying I don't want that or something like that. Just politely say, you know, I prefer not to have dairy because my body doesn't work well with dairy, or I can't consume those that treat because it has, not because my body doesn't work well with nuts.

You know, politely teach your kids how to be politely to decline food product when it comes to allergens.

Terence Martin

You know, even if you coming to bring any if you're the host or you're bringing food product. Also think about other people that may have allergies and may not have communicated, especially if your host and you know you have items there that may have allergies. One of the things I tell people maybe make up the cards that has allergen say this product may have dairy, soy or wheat and put them outside the food containers.

That way people can visually see as well that that product may have allergens in it. I always recommend doing that. If you host an event and you're preparing the food to have a card or some notification that allergies may be there, that way it won't be no misconception that, okay, you didn't tell me he was there, but if you have a card outside the food item itself that say, may contain allergens or it has dairy, soy, or those type of allergies, that way your guests will know that the product actually has Allergens presence there.

So we really want to make sure you have a great holiday. With the holiday season right upon. So just be do your diligence as a host as well as a guest when it comes to.

Terence Martin

Food allergies and people with food allergies. He just wanted to plan, play and plan and communicate much as you can in advance to have a successful holiday event, whether you're the guest or you the host of event. So to plan accordingly much as you can, you know, some of the key things to watch for those hidden. Like I said before, reiterate key things to watch for the hidden allergens like in dressing, sauces, even frosting.

And you know, there is some alcohol that may be a holiday event, maybe libation that may contain some type of dairy or soy or nut in it. So be mindful of that as well as you're making maybe a alcoholic beverage that may contain those allergens as well. And if you're going to have like a buffet style type potluck, I would remind yourself, make sure not sharing spoons, which can be a major source for contamination, have separate dedicated utensils for items that may have those allergens.

Terence Martin

Then you may want to have a certain color code for specific utensils that way. That way you know that, okay, these red utensils specifically for allergens or green utensils, something to identify where it won't be cross contaminated. Another thing to watch for those homemade treats that may be unlabeled, that might not have any labeling on it, like candies, cookies, you know, baked goods which can be real risky because it don't have a label.

So you can't read what's the ingredients in it? So just be mindful and proactive when it comes to these holidays events to prevent allergic reaction, and make sure you create a festive and safe holiday experience for everyone, including yourself as a host. That way, you won't wind up at an emergency room and kind of have that hanging over your head at your festive holiday event.

Terence Martin

Once again, this is Dr. Terrance Martin, *Food Defenders* food safety specialist at Alabama extension at Alabama A&M. Have a wonderful, wonderful holidays and stay safe and diligent when it comes to your guests.

(Outro Music) Once again, this is Dr. Terrence Martin with *Food Defenders* with Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M. Stay safe and knowledgeable of what's going on around you...everything food.