

Loyola pediatrician provides Halloween tips for nut allergy sufferers

October 13 2010, By Evie Polsley

The scary reality is that food allergies are becoming more and more common in the United States. In the last 10 years there has been an 18 percent increase in children with food allergies. In fact, one in 22 children has a food allergy. That means most likely there is at least one child in each classroom with a food allergy. Halloween parties and trick or treating are just a few of the fall activities that can heighten the danger for kids with food allergies.

“Nut allergies can be especially dangerous,” said Sean Cahill, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. “Allergies can be a life-or-death situation. Just because a child only had a rash the first time exposed doesn’t mean it won’t be more serious the next time.”

Reactions can cause symptoms that range from watery eyes and a rash to anaphylaxis, which is when a person’s airway swells and blood pressure drops. This can hinder breathing and cause a person to lose consciousness.

“A peanut [allergy](#) is not limited to peanuts. Some people with a peanut allergy are allergic to numerous types of [nuts](#) and seeds, and nut allergies are often seen in kids with other food allergies, like eggs, or in kids with asthma and eczema,” Cahill said.

Nuts contain tough proteins that protect seeds from being decomposed in the ground and from animals trying to eat them, like us. These proteins

are the cause of the allergic reaction.

“Research is showing that it’s not airborne particles of nuts inhaled causing reactions, instead it is touching a surface that has been exposed to a nut and then ingesting the particles,” Cahill said.

Here are a few tips to help keep your child safe at Halloween parties:

1. Talk with the party host about your child’s allergy and provide a list of specific foods that may cause a reaction.
2. Make sure all pans, dishes and serving utensils have been thoroughly cleaned if previously used with nuts. If the brownies with nuts are baked in the same pan as the brownies without nuts, an allergic reaction may still occur.
3. When shopping, check labels. If it says the food has been made on the same machine as another with nuts, stay away. If it is processed in the same plant as products with nuts, it’s probably OK.
4. Wipe down all surfaces. Remember, it’s touching a surface exposed to nuts, not inhaling nut particles, that causes a reaction.

Here are a few ideas for keeping trick or treating safe for children with allergies:

1. If you have younger children, give nut-free candy to neighbors in advance of [Halloween](#) and take your child to that specific house.
2. As soon as your children return home, go through their candy and separate all treats with nuts or those that could cause a reaction. When in doubt, get rid of the candy. It’s always a good idea to check your child’s candy after trick or treating, even if they don’t have an allergy.

3. After you, a friend or relative have eaten a product with nuts, be sure to brush your teeth and wash your hands before hugging or kissing a child with an allergy.

“Though having a nut allergy is serious, kids should still be able to have fun. The key is education. Make sure your child knows what he or she can eat,” Cahill said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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