

## Kids don't get a Christmas break from allergies: Pediatric allergist gives tips on how to keep kids healthy

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Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, candles filling the air with the smell of cinnamon and beloved decorations making their yearly appearance really do help make the season bright. But for kids with allergies these holiday delights can make the atmosphere miserable and even deadly.

"During the winter months many parents think their kids get a reprieve from allergies. Unfortunately, allergens are around all year long. [Dust mites](#), mold, food and pet allergies don't take a Christmas vacation," said pediatric allergist Joyce Rabbat, MD.

With all the holiday parties and family gatherings, food allergies can be a real concern for parents.

"During the holidays it can be easy to be tempted by all the wonderful goodies that everyone else is eating. And so often it can be difficult to decipher what contains allergens and what does not," Rabbat said. "Food allergies are especially dangerous because even small exposure to a [food allergen](#) can be devastating."

Here are some tips if your holiday plans include a child with a [food allergy](#):

- If possible, avoid the allergen in food preparations. "There are

lots of alternatives that can be substituted into favorite holiday recipes," Rabbat said.

- If you just can't change the recipe, make sure you prepare all foods without the allergen first. This will limit cross-contamination.
- Make sure after you've prepared a food with the allergen, that you thoroughly clean all utensils used and the surface areas that were exposed to the allergen.
- When serving the meal, try to have an allergy-free area to reduce the risk of accidental exposure. "If food with an allergen is spilled on the table and the child touches it and/or ingests it, the child could have a serious reaction. Having allergen-free serving areas helps minimize the chance that serving utensils are used in both allergen-containing dishes and allergen-free dishes," Rabbat said.
- Make sure those who have come in contact with an allergen wash their hands and face before interacting with a child with an allergy. "Parents need to understand that no matter how hard someone tries to keep the festivities allergen-free there is always a possibility of exposure so come prepared with medications," Rabbat said.

She suggests adults seek medical attention if they notice a child has any of these symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Swelling
- Throat swelling/closing
- Coughing
- Dizziness
- Change of color (pale or blue)

- Vomiting or diarrhea

Still, [food](#) allergies aren't the only ones that affect kids over the holidays. Live Christmas trees, holiday plants, dust and mold from old decorations and even pets can cause an allergic reaction. But, according to Rabbat, one of the often-overlooked triggers is scented candles and air fresheners.

"Stay away from artificial scents in air fresheners and candles as these can irritate the lungs and trigger asthma symptoms. They might smell nice, but they don't smell nearly as good as cookies baking in the oven. So, enjoy the real scents of the holidays instead," Rabbat said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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