

Preventing Cross-Contact *and* Accidental Environmental Exposure

Cross-contact and environmental exposure are often cited as top concerns for families managing food allergies. Cross-contact can occur through incidental contact with utensils, pots and pans, and preparation surfaces.

Environmental exposure can occur through contamination of surfaces and are widely thought to occur through inhalation of allergen. This is a particular concern at school and on airplanes. The good news is that allergens can be readily cleaned from hands and body parts, cookware and utensils, and environmental surfaces.

Tips to prevent environmental contamination:

When cleaning surfaces (such as desks, counters, tables, airline seats or tray tables, etc.), use a wipe that contains a commercial detergent (e.g., Clorox®, Lysol®, etc), or apply a spray-on detergent (e.g. Formula 409®, Fantastic®, Windex® Multi-Surface, etc.) and vigorously wipe the area that has come into contact with the allergen.

In a 2004 study, dish soap did not remove peanut allergen.

Run contaminated pots, pans, and utensils through a normal dishwasher cycle or wash them by hand with hot, soapy water and scrub the surfaces thoroughly. Use a sponge, scouring pad, or dish rag that has not come into contact with the allergen. Rinse and dry thoroughly with a clean towel. Avoid just wiping down a knife or common utensil with a rag after touching an allergen (a common practice at sandwich shops).

For washing hands or face, use warm/hot, soapy water or a commercial “tidy” wipe. Hand sanitizing gel is not sufficient to remove allergens. This is important in the healthcare setting, as most healthcare facilities have moved to near-exclusive use of hand sanitizing gels for infectious purposes.

