

SPECIAL FEATURE

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HOW MUCH BRIBERY GOES ON BY
MABISCO AND OTHERS TO ALLOW SUCH
THINGS TO CONTINUE?

em," says the FDA's Kenneth Falci. The goal should be that no foods come off the line that way."

No wonder people with severe allergies have to worry about packaged foods:

■ In 1997, a three-year-old boy in Bristol, Tennessee, who was allergic to milk ate half a cup of lemon sorbet. Within 20 minutes, his face started to swell and he began to vomit. It turned out that the sorbet contained tiny amounts of milk and whey protein, which didn't appear on the label. Those ingredients had been in the ice cream made during the previous four months using the same equipment.⁶

■ Last fall, Ben & Jerry's recalled 80,000 pints of its Peanut Butter Cup ice cream after realizing that the company had accidentally added nuts to it. Six consumers reported suffering allergic reactions.

■ "In a case I was involved with," recalls Hugh Sampson, "a college student who was allergic to peanuts bought cookies from a vending machine. They did not have peanuts listed on the label." But there were peanuts in the cookies, and the student died after eating them. "Apparently, the company had a little bit of batter left over from some peanut butter cookies and just threw it into a batch of another kind of cookie and figured that it didn't matter."

U.S. food manufacturers were forced to recall 125 products last year because they contained undeclared allergens.

4) Labels don't have to disclose allergens in flavors. When a food contains flavorings that are derived from plants or animals, the ingredient list can simply say "natural flavor." Sounds innocent, but those flavorings could contain allergens from milk, eggs, nuts, or other foods.

"In 1996, the FDA asked the food industry to voluntarily label the sources of flavors if they contained known allergens," says Peter Skinner, a scientist in New York State Attorney General's office. "Some firms have more or less complied, but a lot of others haven't or are doing it in their own unique way, so there's no real consistency across the

MAKING FOODS SAFE

In May 2000, the Attorneys General of Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wyoming asked the Food and Drug Administration to make it easier for consumers to identify and avoid foods that can trigger allergic reactions.

You can help support their sensible proposal by mailing this coupon.

To: FDA Commissioner
5600 Fishers Lane

Fax: (301) 827-1412

Rockville, Maryland 20857

E-mail: execsec@oc.fda.gov

From: THE ATTENTION OF FDA

I HAVE TRIED AND TRIED TO BRING TO
ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: CANOLA, COTTON SEED,
PALM OR SOYBEAN OIL. WHY IN GODS
NAME DO YOU ALLOW THIS? THERE APPEARS TO
BE A LACK OF A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PALM
AND CANOLA? I WANT TO KNOW THE CONTENTS

As a member of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, I urge you to invest more resources to ensure that:

- food labels completely and accurately list the presence of all known allergens, including those used in flavorings;
- food manufacturers adopt measures to prevent the unintentional contamination of their products with undeclared food allergens; and
- food manufacturers include a toll-free telephone number on their labels

that consumers can call for more information about ingredients.

NOT WHAT IT MAY CONTAIN, WHAT THE
HELL IS THE MATTER WITH YOU PEOPLE?

Last year, tired of waiting for the FDA to close up this loophole, the Attorneys General of New York and eight other states, including Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee, petitioned the FDA to change the law (see "Making Food Safe").

- ¹ J. Allergy Clin. Immunol. 107: 191, 2001.
- ² J. Allergy Clin. Immunol. 103: 559, 1999.
- ³ Amer. J. Clin. Nutr. 68: 1118, 1998.
- ⁴ J. Allergy Clin. Immunol. 106 (S Pt 1): 973, 2000.
- ⁵ J. Allergy Clin. Immunol. 100: 596, 1997.
- ⁶ J. Food Protec. 61: 1522, 1998.

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For More Information

The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) is a non-profit group working to increase public awareness of food allergies.

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Fairfax, Virginia 22030-2208

Phone: (800) 929-4040
E-mail: faan@foodallergy.org
Web: www.foodallergy.org

For more information about food allergies and the studies described in this article, visit our Web site at www.cspinet.org/nah/04_01/allergylinks.html

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is the division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that supports research on allergies, infectious diseases, and immunology.

Mail: NIAID Office of Communications and Public Liaison
Building 31, Room 7A-50
31 Center Drive MSC 2520
Bethesda, Maryland 20892-2520

Web: www.niaid.nih.gov
Food-allergies fact sheet:
www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/food.htm

For a list of foods that have been recalled due to possible contamination with allergens:

- www.safetyalerts.com/rcls/category/allrgy.htm
- www.foodallergy.org/alerts.html

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