



POTENTIAL FOOD ALLERGENS

in Preschool and School Activities



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) “Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs” says, “Avoid the use of identified allergens in class projects, parties, holidays and celebrations, arts, crafts, science experiments, cooking, snacks, or rewards.”

Below is a list of some unexpected places you may encounter food allergens, along with alternatives and precautions. This is only a general guide and is not inclusive of every potential food allergen. It’s important to verify all ingredients before a child with food allergies engages in an activity that uses food-based materials. Remember, ingredients can and do change!

ACTIVITY/MATERIALS	ALLERGEN(S)	POTENTIALLY SAFE ALTERNATIVES AND APPROPRIATE PRECAUTIONS
Counting/sorting beans, grains, pasta, M&Ms® or other small foods	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to choose food items with safe ingredients • Remember that different-sized packages can have different ingredients
Sensory tables that use grains, pasta, candies or other small foods	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to choose food items with safe ingredients • Use non-food items
Baking projects	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share safe recipes • Request to participate in any baking activities
Projects using empty egg cartons, milk cartons, beverage cartons, yogurt containers, food jars, etc.	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safe empty containers
Birthday and holiday celebrations	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a non-food celebration (i.e., songs, goodie bags, stickers) • Provide safe cake or cupcakes for the class
Play kitchen	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empty egg cartons, milk cartons, cereal boxes, and baby food jars may contain remnants of food allergens. Use empty containers from “real” products that didn’t use common food allergens or use “fake” food containers made with cardboard or plastic.
Musical instruments – Allergens may be present on mouth-blown musical instruments	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove mouth-blown musical instruments from classrooms • Provide a designated set of mouth-blown instruments for for each child or for children with food allergies
Handwashing (teachers and children)	Potentially all*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read soap, liquid soap, wipe and lotion labels to determine if allergens are present • Use paper towels to dry hands, since cloth towels may contain food residue
Finger paint	Wheat, Milk, Corn, Oat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to find milk-free finger paints • Read labels to find a safe laundry soap • Laundry starch or soap can be omitted if avoiding corn
Bird feeders	Wheat, Peanut butter, Nuts, Seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider making a hummingbird or butterfly feeder instead using sugar, water and food coloring • Use soy butter, sunflower butter or honey • Use safe seeds or seed mix without wheat seeds or nuts
Planting seeds	Legumes (such as beans, peas or peanuts), Corn, Egg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use any other seeds • Provide safe empty containers to grow seeds
Potting soil	Nuts, Soy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to find safe potting soil

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013.

*“Potentially all” means that all allergens are possible.

ACTIVITY/MATERIALS	ALLERGEN(S)	POTENTIALLY SAFE ALTERNATIVES AND APPROPRIATE PRECAUTIONS
Paper-mache	Wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elmer's® Glue solution • Buckwheat flour solution
Play-Doh® (commercial or wheat-based homemade)	Wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinetic Sand • Homemade rice- or buckwheat-based play dough • Other sensory materials such as goop, slime or oobleck • Homemade play dough or oobleck (see recipe section below) • There are commercial gluten-free play doughs available at discountschoolsupply.com
Craft paste	Wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to choose food items with safe ingredients • Elmer's® Glue sticks
Macaroni art	Wheat, Egg, Legumes (such as beans, peas or peanuts), Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rice macaroni • Quinoa macaroni • Corn macaroni
Tempera paint (homemade and some high-end commercial products)	Egg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crayola® Kids Paint • Read labels to find egg-free paint since some high-end versions contain egg • Most commercial tempera paints are suitable for children
Crayons	Soy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to find soy-free crayons • This is only a concern for younger aged children who may still put items in their mouths and eat the crayons
Shaving cream	Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to find dairy-free shaving cream
Making butter	Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a dairy-free recipe to make a coconut and/or olive oil based alternative
Dustless chalk	Casein (milk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use dry erasers or smartboards
Oobleck, goop, slime	Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read labels to choose items with safe ingredients • Create mixture using tapioca starch instead of cornstarch (use less water when using tapioca starch)
Making maracas or shakers	Legumes (such as beans, peas or peanuts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill maracas or shakers with rice, popcorn or sand

RECIPES	ACTIVITY/INGREDIENTS	ALLERGEN(S)/INSTRUCTIONS
	Rice Play Dough 1 ¼ cups rice flour ½ cup salt 2 tsp cream of tartar 1 cup water 1 tbsp oil ¼ tsp vanilla extract Food coloring/sparkles (optional)	Rice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix flour, salt and cream of tartar in a large pot. Add water and oil. • Cook over medium heat until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan (about 5 minutes), stirring constantly. • Add vanilla extract (for smell, not taste). Mix thoroughly. Put play dough on a clean surface. When cool enough to handle, knead lightly and store in airtight container. • Add food coloring to the water to make colored play dough. Add sparkles during the hand mixing time for sparkly play dough.
	Cornstarch Play Dough 1 cup cornstarch 1 lb baking soda 1 cup water ⅛ tsp oil Food coloring (optional)	Corn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a large pot, combine ingredients. Cook over medium heat until "mealy." Allow to cool on a plate, covered by a damp cloth. Knead well and store in an airtight container.
	Sweet Play Dough 3 cups powdered sugar ¼ cup corn syrup ½ cup margarine, melted Splash vanilla Sprinkle salt 5 drops food coloring	Corn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix all ingredients, except coloring, until mixture is blended and all one color. Then mix in coloring. • You can shape this and eat it, assuming your child is not allergic to any of the ingredients. Do not make this in advance. Make this when you are going to play with it. It will get hard and become inedible.
	Oobleck 1 ½ cups cornstarch 1 cup water Food coloring (optional)	Corn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix the ingredients together. When children play with the mixture, it will be solid when they squeeze it and liquid when they release it.