

# New Law Causes Big Reaction

By Reg P. Wydeven  
February 18, 2006

On January 1, 2006, a very important new law went into effect. This law won't put drunk drivers behind bars. It won't lower taxes. It won't stop the government from spying on us. To most people, this law means peanuts, but to me, that's why I think it's so great.

The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 went into effect at the beginning of the year. Crafted by the Food and Drug Administration, the Act requires food manufacturers to identify in plain English if their products contain any ingredients with proteins derived from the eight major allergenic foods - milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, soybeans, tree nuts and peanuts.

You see, both my wife and my son, Matthew, have serious food allergies. They are both allergic to peanuts, tree nuts and milk, and Matthew is also allergic to eggs, not to mention dogs and cats. Basically he's on the Atkin's diet without realizing it's trendy. We first figured out that he had food allergies after my dad gave him a spoonful of ice cream and he turned red and blotchy and started to wheeze.

We were hesitant to bring our baby in to get tested for allergies because we still vividly remember the painful scratch-tests we had as kids. Little did we know there were huge advances in allergy testing in the last 25 years. To test Matthew, the doctor simply touched a dozen or so special magic markers to his back to see which ones he reacted to.

Since we discovered his allergies, our doctor prescribed for him an epi-pen jr. to use if he ever ingested one of the foods he was allergic to. Then we learned how to read ingredients on food labels. To be honest, I have an easier time understanding a legal dictionary containing nothing but Latin terms.

For example, because Matthew is allergic to milk, I had to read food labels to see if they contained casein or whey, which are proteins derived from milk. Thankfully, under the Act, food labels will now simply state whether the product contains 'milk'.

Two weeks ago, Matthew scavenged a discarded cookie at play group. My wife got it out of his mouth before he swallowed it, but he still broke out in hives. On the way to the emergency room, his throat swelled up and he couldn't breathe. Like Superwoman, my wife pulled over, jumped in the backseat and gave him his epi-pen. He immediately started feeling better, and by the time they got to the hospital, the doctor said he was doing great and my wife was a hero.

The cookies contained eggs, but because the box was printed last year, the label said they contained ovalbumin. From now on, though, the label will clearly say the cookies contain 'eggs'.

About 2 percent of adults and 5 percent of infants and young children in the U.S. suffer from food allergies. Under the Act, these people, or their parents, will now have a much easier time identifying which foods they should stay away from.

So to avoid having to go through a horrible event like my wife did, please do me and your kids a favor and have them tested for food allergies.

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