

February 26, 2020

Written Testimony:

My name is Jake Gillespie, I am fifteen years old, and I have been dealing with food allergies for all fifteen of those years. I carry an Epi-Pen, an injection device that contains epinephrine, which stops anaphylactic reactions. Thankfully, I have not had an allergic reaction since I was a baby, but I must be careful to avoid potential allergens.

One of the most challenging places to avoid food allergens is in restaurants. While restaurants have safety standards they must follow, they do not have to exclude foods that are common allergens. According to the CDC, the eight most common of these food allergies are milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts and tree nuts. All eight of these foods are not uncommon to see in a restaurant. For that reason, it is important that a person with food allergies carries an Epi-Pen with them, especially when eating at a restaurant.

When dining in a restaurant, most people, including myself, tell their server about their food allergies prior to ordering, but there still is a risk of misunderstanding or cross contamination. Individuals with food allergies don't always carry epinephrine for various reasons; they may not know the severity of their allergy, for instance, or perhaps they forgot their Epi-Pen. This is why it is important for restaurants to carry Epi-Pens and for staff to be given proper training in the area of food allergy prevention, symptom recognition and appropriate response.

Fatal food allergy cases are very rare stories, but should not be taken lightly. One death is one death too many.