

Hi,

As you are reviewing your current Federal Transportation Guidelines I would like to take this opportunity to provide feedback on your response to mitigating the risk of allergic reactions for airline passengers.

I have a severe allergy to all tree nuts and have had recent and frequent experience traveling. I will start by saying that in all other aspects of my life I do not request that people avoid eating nuts around me. I take personal responsibility for managing my allergies and I am careful to watch my environment and carry my EpiPen.

Airline travel is a very different situation; I am confined to a small space and have limited access to medical care. To make matters worse many airlines sell trail mix; which is particularly hazardous as people eat it with their fingers and then proceed to touch everything around them. I have had multiple incidents on airlines where passengers have been eating nuts in close proximity. One example of this was a woman with a large bag of nuts walking her child up and down the aisles as she touched all of the seats and then went into the bathroom with the nuts. Normally I would just avoid someone like this (for instance if I was in a store) but it was near impossible on this flight and left me basically stuck in my seat and having to take antihistamines as I broke out in hives and my throat started to swell.

On my latest trip I requested the "buffer zone" that has been provided as a "safety measure". It's a nice idea in theory, but not all that sensible once you have experienced it. For instance on one of my flights the people in front of me and behind me were notified (which was great) but the person directly across the aisle from me was not. I could literally reach out and touch the person across the aisle from me and they would have been the greatest risk to me if they had consumed nuts. On another flight the flight attendant forgot and brought the person in front of me trail mix.

It was also embarrassing to be singled out on each flight. I had six flights in total and I was singled out in every one of them and pointed out to my fellow passengers. Everyone was really nice about it, but I can't see how this would be acceptable with any other disability. It was uncomfortable and could deter me from requesting a buffer zone in the future.

I understand that people can bring their own food on airlines (which makes sense and there would be no feasible way to regulate this). What I would like to see is airlines stop selling nuts and other top allergens. There are many other foods they can provide and profit from without taking an unnecessary risk. If the only people I had to have a polite conversation with were those who packed their own nuts I would feel much safer in the air.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

Shannon Moffat, MPH, BSN, RN