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Media Release

New International study released about in-flight food allergies

A new international study led jointly by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and the University of Michigan has identified ways to reduce the chance of an allergic reaction to nuts on flights.

Lead author, Allergist and Pediatrician Matthew Greenhawt, M.D., M.B.A., M.Sc., of the University of Michigan's Food Allergy Centre and C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, and his co-authors from Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and the International Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Alliance, asked passengers to answer an online survey about their in-flight experiences.

The study recently published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology-In Practice* found that passengers who engaged in eight mitigating factors were less likely to report an allergic reaction.

These are:

- requesting any accommodation (see below examples)
- requesting a peanut/tree nut-free meal
- wiping their tray table with a commercial wipe
- avoiding use of airline pillows
- avoiding use of airline blankets
- requesting a peanut/tree nut-free buffer zone
- requesting other passengers not consume peanut/tree nut-containing products
- not consuming airline-provided food

More than 3,200 people from 11 countries took part in the international survey. Of those, 349 reported having an allergic reaction during an airline flight. This is the first study to show that in-flight peanut and tree nut allergy is an international problem.

"Few situations can provoke more anxiety for people with peanut or tree-nut allergies than having an allergic reaction while flying on an airplane and being unable to get help", says Maria Said, President of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.

Both the individual at risk of food anaphylaxis and the aircraft carrier have responsibilities to do what they can to reduce risk and know what to do when an in flight emergency happens.

"I hope these passenger-initiated behaviours provide a starting point for both airlines and individuals with peanut or tree nut allergy. 1 in 10 Australian infants now have food allergy. Some will outgrow their allergy but most with an allergy to peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish and sesame seed will have it for life. A person on a flight with a food allergy is not a rarity in 2013," Said continued.

"Measures to reduce risk should be explored by airlines, especially if they are easily actioned and can be initiated by motivated passengers. Though the larger issue is the appropriateness of serving packs of peanuts and tree nuts on aircraft, while this policy issue is being addressed, this study highlights that there

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are relatively easy, practical measures that can be implemented which may reduce passenger risk, and increase passenger comfort in travelling by air. These passengers are an important customer base, and what our data suggests is that there may be practical and low-cost solutions to provide some measure of comfort in what is a potentially frightening experience for a peanut or tree nut allergic passenger. This we feel truly is a win-win situation. Many airlines do have policies in place; however, clear understanding of how to best manage this situation is lacking both at the passenger and airline level. More education and research needs to be done," Said stated.

"While the risk of an in-flight reaction is small - no one wants to experience a reaction while they're at 35,000 feet. This study gives some practical advice for passengers to help reduce their anxiety and improve their quality of life," notes Dr. Greenhawt.

Said added, " Risk of an allergic reaction can be reduced but never removed. Individuals at risk, even after all the checks, must always have their adrenaline autoinjector (EpiPen or Anapen) and Action Plan (emergency response plan) on their person or easily accessible. Australians can also access a Travel Plan which is to be completed by a doctor prior to travel (visit www.allergy.org.au)".

Food Allergy Week is 13 – 19 May 2013, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia encourage everyone to support those 1 children out of 10 living with food allergies by painting 1 fingernail out of 10 and donating at www.foodallergyaware.com.au

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