

From the American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology
<http://www.aaaai.org/ask-the-expert/inhaled-tree-nut-allergen.aspx>

Question:

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In a pediatric patient with proven tree nut allergy, what are the risks and recommendations for avoidance measures outdoors, playing in an area where tree nuts have fallen (ie - under a walnut or pecan tree)? How strict should the parents be? What are contact risks? What are inhalant risks (crushed walnut shells used in garden, etc.)?

A:

Your question is focusing on contact sensitivity or inhaled exposure in an individual who is tree nut allergic. Although it is difficult to make absolute statements, I am convinced by the available literature and clinical experience that there is no significant risk associated with a tree nut allergic person engaging in activities in close proximity to a tree, even with nuts on the ground around the tree. Certainly skin contact with nuts outside of the shell is a potential risk if common sense measures of avoidance are not in play. Although aerosol food allergen exposure has been described, this has been primarily in cooking of the food. I have cared for a patient who would have respiratory symptoms when sitting in an establishment with peanut shells on the floor, so aerosol exposure is theoretically possible but is not a realistic concern in an outside environment.

In summary, there is risk in any activity of life. I think you can reassure your patient and their family that the risk of playing under a pecan or walnut tree is negligible, even with pecan or walnut allergy, as long as the nuts are not handled or eaten. Inhalation risk is not a concern in this circumstance.

I have attached a couple of references and a prior Ask The Expert question. Peanut allergy is often the subject of interest but I think we can apply information from peanut to other tree nuts.