

Testing 101 for Certified Free From™ Kitchens

Overview

Chemical testing is part of Certified Free From's comprehensive approach to validating allergen-free claims. While there are many types of testing methods out there, our standards recommend the use of lateral flow devices (LFDs). These are allergen-specific, easy to use, and quick to deliver results.

The CFF Scheme and Standards for Kitchens requires surface swabs for all allergens in the scope of certification, at least one a month. You will need to purchase a separate kit for every allergen included in your scope of certification. For example, if you are Certified Free From the top 9 allergens, you will end up purchasing 9 test kits.

While only vetted ingredients should be entering a certified space, routine allergen testing can catch any potential issues before they turn into life-altering problems.

Ordering the Test Kits

MenuTrinfo provides a list of pre-approved allergen test kits. If you need a new copy, please reach out to CFFsupport@MenuTrinfo.com. The kits can be ordered directly through the manufacturer, or through third-party suppliers such as Emport, LLC. We do not sell the test kits through our office, they must be acquired by the CFF site.

The kits typically come with 10-50 tests/box, depending on the brand. Some require refrigeration, and come with an expiration date. Supply issues can crop up, so you should always order new kits well in advance of running out.



How and Where to Test

When it comes to determining a spot to swab, we recommend a high-traffic surface or a piece of equipment that's harder to clean. While we never anticipate getting a positive test, it's best to test the highest-risk areas to be certain all allergy mitigation procedures are being followed.

To complete the swab tests, you should always follow the manufacturer's instructions. In general, the tests involve swabbing a small area with a provided swab, swirling the swab in a solution, then testing that solution with a test strip. Lateral flow device tests use the same technology as a Covid or pregnancy test, so interpreting the test involves looking for the presence of a positive test line and a control line.

If you are Certified Free From multiple allergens, you will need to be careful to not mix up solutions and test strips. We have seen many kitchens find success by labeling small pieces of paper with the name of the allergen, then keeping all materials (swab, solution and test strip) on that paper to avoid a mix-up during testing.

How to Submit Test Results

We require all kitchen clients to submit test results for every allergen in their scope of certification, at least once a month. These are due by the 10th of the following month (e.g., March's test results are due by April 10th). Upon being onboarded, you will be provided with a template to submit each month, along with a picture of every test kit.

While unexpected, a positive test result is possible. If you do have a test come up positive, you should immediately re-swab the area with a new swab to ensure it wasn't a false positive. If the second test comes back negative, test one more time to confirm. The initial positive result needs to be submitted to MenuTrinfo within 24 hours of it occurring, but no further action is necessary.

If back-to-back tests come back positive, then a full investigation is needed to determine the source of the positive test, and MenuTrinfo needs to be notified within 24 hours. A root cause analysis and corrective action plan need to be submitted to MenuTrinfo.

Disclaimer: *This document is for informational purposes only, and does not provide legally binding requirements. Certified Free From by MenuTrinfo participants are required to pass all standards, including those regarding testing, in order to achieve certification. This information is being provided to all CFF participants, and while following the advice provided is strongly recommended, it does not guarantee an easier, faster, or cheaper audit.*

