

Allergen Awareness

Allergen Awareness is essential for your food business.

Some people are allergic to particular foods or ingredients in foods. If they eat or have contact with these foods, even trace amounts, they may have an allergic reaction, with symptoms ranging from mild to severe to life-threatening. All food businesses should be aware of food allergens in order to protect their customers and avoid legal consequences.

Everyone in your food business – from the manager through to the food preparation and food service staff need to be aware of the risks food allergies pose and need to be clear on how to identify and manage food allergens and enquiries from customers with food allergies.

What is an allergy?

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein that the body mistakenly believes is harmful.

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening.

What is the law?

As a food business you are required by law to provide accurate information about whether the food you sell contains allergens and these must be clearly communicated to your customers upon request or clearly labelled on packaged food. It is an offence under the law if an allergen is found in a food that was specifically requested by a customer not to contain that allergen and if accurate allergen information is not on a label.

What foods cause most allergic reactions?

The most common food allergens, which cause around 90% of food allergic reactions include:

- Peanuts and their products
- Tree nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts) and their products
- Egg and egg products
- Milk and milk products (this includes all dairy foods)
- Soy and soy products (including soybeans)
- Sesame and sesame products

- Fish and fish products
- Shellfish (prawns, crabs, lobster) and their products
- Gluten and gluten containing cereals (wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt)
- Wheat and wheat products (bran, bread, couscous, pasta, noodles, semolina)
- Lupin – a legume related to pea, peanut and soy (lupin bran, lupin fibre, lupin flour).

Ways to manage allergens in your food business

Listen to your customers and be truthful

- Take customer requests about allergens seriously. Listen carefully.
- If you are unsure of the customer's requirements, say so. Never guess about allergens in food; a wrong response could lead to a life-threatening allergic reaction.
- Give customers accurate information about the content of meals when they ask.
- Have a strict and documented procedure to follow if a customer says they have a food allergy.
- Consider providing allergen information on your menu to help customers easily determine what foods they should avoid.
- Include a note on all menus asking customers to always disclose their food allergy when ordering from the menu.

Know what's in your food

- Only accept labelled packaged foods or foods supplied with ingredient information.
- Check all ingredients even in sauces, spices, garnish, oils, dressings etc. for allergens.
- Avoid ingredient substitution when preparing food if you are not sure what the replacement product contains
- Create standard recipe cards for all dishes and follow them exactly.

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- Be familiar with all ingredients as some may be made from one or more food allergens which may not be obvious from their name.
- Complete an allergen matrix for each menu item which will help you and your staff easily identify the common allergens when customers ask for allergen information. An example of an allergen matrix template is attached.

Prepare food safely

- Avoid cross contamination of food allergens.
- Always double check the ingredients with the chef and the customer and the matrix (if unsure).
- Handle food safely with clean hands washed with warm, soapy water. Hands should be washed regularly and you should re-wash your hands before preparing food that must be free of a specific allergen.
- Clean and sanitise work surfaces, utensils and other food-contact items between foods. Even trace amounts of allergens can be harmful.
- Store food safely in clearly labelled containers.
- Have a dedicated area for preparing allergen free meals
- Have a clear way of identifying the meal for the person with a food allergy (such as specific colour coding or different shape for plated meals or stickers and labels for wrapped foods).
- Always take the meal to the customer with a food allergy separately, not whilst carrying other meals.
- Ensure that the correct allergen free meal is given to the person with the food allergy declared.

Educate your staff – Understand the consequences

- If you are required to have a Food Safety Supervisor, ensure their training is up to date.
- Train and test all staff regularly in food safety, hygiene and allergen awareness.

Useful internet links

Free on-line training -

<https://foodallergytraining.org.au/>

More free on-line training -

<http://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/index.php/component/topics/topic/food-allergens>

Allergen cards -

<https://allergyfacts.org.au/resources/allergen-cards>

Allergen information for food manufacturers -

<http://www.allergenbureau.net/>

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia food service kit, matrix template and food allergen cards -

<https://foodallergytraining.org.au/mod/page/view.php?id=7>

Dept of Health & Human Services -

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-allergen-awareness>

Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia resources for

industry - <https://allergyfacts.org.au/allergy-management/food-industry/food-service>

Food Standards Australia New Zealand resources for industry -

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/foodallergenportal/Pages/Allergy-information-for-the-food-service-industry.aspx>

Food Allergen Matrix

Completed by: _____ Date of allergen matrix: _____

Review and update every time an ingredient or recipe changes
Distribute updated copies to all relevant front and back of house staff

Menu item	Peanuts and their products	Tree nuts and their products	Egg and egg products	Milk and milk products	Soy and soy products	Sesame and sesame products	Fish and fish products	Crustaceans (shellfish) and their products	Gluten and gluten-containing cereals	Wheat and wheat products	Lupin