



BE
PREPARED
BE ALLERGY
AWARE
It's worth the effort

Food allergy is a growing problem, particularly amongst children, and can have serious ramifications, causing illness, even death.

The most severe allergic reaction is known as anaphylaxis, which can be life threatening.

Several studies from around the world indicate that most severe allergic reactions occur when eating away from home. A recent US study* revealed that almost 50 per cent of those reactions happened as a result of food eaten in restaurants or other food service establishments.

So it is important that everyone who works in food service is aware of the risks that food allergies pose, and knows their obligations when preparing and serving food to customers with food allergy.

Both the customer and the food service business play a role in preventing an allergic incident.

The law requires you to provide accurate information when a customer asks about allergens in foods you are serving.

With knowledge and organisation, incidents can be avoided.

* Source: C Weiss, A Munoz Furlong. *Food Protection Trends*, Sept 2008.



KNOW your ingredients



AVOID cross contamination



LISTEN to your customers

FOOD ALLERGY IS A SERIOUS ISSUE

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Take customer requests about allergies seriously.

Everyone — from the manager through to the food preparation and food service staff — needs to be aware of the risks food allergies pose, and be clear on how to identify and manage them.

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein that the body mistakenly believes is harmful. It is not the result of food contaminated by a toxin.

There is no cure for a food allergy. Avoidance is the only way to prevent a reaction.

A food allergy is not the same as food intolerance. Food intolerance is the inability to properly digest or fully process certain foods. The most common intolerances include lactose, gluten, yeast and sulphite.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of a food allergy vary from person to person. A severe allergic reaction can happen very quickly after eating.

Symptoms can include: hives, swelling of the lips, face and eyes, abdominal pain, vomiting, swelling of the tongue, breathing difficulty, dizziness or collapse. Some symptoms can be fatal.

What foods are most allergenic?

Nine foods cause around 90% of food allergic reactions. They are: peanuts, tree nuts (eg almonds, cashews), eggs, milk, fish, crustacean (shellfish eg prawns, lobster), sesame, soy and wheat.

Manufacturers must, by law, declare the first eight of these, and their products, in the ingredient lists on labels.

Wheat and wheat products containing gluten must be declared. Although not legally required, it is also useful to know when gluten-free wheat is present, as it is another common allergen.

Most fatal allergic reactions are triggered by peanut.



Who is affected?

In Australia, one in 10 children** under the age of 5 years and an increasing number of adults have food allergies. Australia has one of the highest allergy rates in the world, and the problem is growing.

** Osborne et al. *Prevalence of challenge-proven IgE-mediated food allergy using population-based sampling and predetermined challenge criteria in infants.* J Allergy Clin Immunol 2011; 127: 668-676

EVERY STAFF MEMBER CONTRIBUTES T

REQUIREMENTS OF THE FOOD STANDARDS CODE

- The eight most common food allergens:

- peanut
- tree nut
- egg
- milk
- fish
- crustacean
- sesame
- soy

must be declared on food labels of packaged foods. Gluten and sulphites must also be declared on food labels of packaged foods.

- Consumers have a legal right to receive, on request, written or verbal information on allergen content when buying takeaway foods or eating out.
- Food businesses breach the code if:
 - accurate information is not on a label or is not given by staff selling unpackaged food made at the premises when a customer asks for it, or
 - an allergen is found in a food that was specifically requested not to contain that allergen.

MANAGEMENT

Good training and good systems are critical:

- Develop a process for preparing foods for customers with allergies and ensure it is followed.
- Train your staff so they understand their obligation to declare certain allergens and other substances in food if the customer asks.
- Only use ingredients that are clearly and correctly labelled.
- Ask your suppliers about their allergen management policy and for a Product Information Form (PIF).
- Establish clear procedures for rework.
- Consider providing allergen information on your menu to help customers easily determine what foods they should avoid.



0 FOOD SAFETY

FOOD PREPARATION

When preparing a meal for someone with an allergy:

- Advise all kitchen staff that an allergen-free meal is being prepared.
- Avoid cross contamination at all times – from the time the food arrives at the business to when it is served to a customer.
- Store food safely in clearly labelled containers.
- Keep surfaces, utensils and hands clean.
- Do not substitute or add ingredients if you are not sure what the replacement product contains.
- Check that no high-risk garnishes have been added to the plate.
- Know your ingredients. Always read the labels.
- Remember that heating and cooling food does not destroy allergens.



FOOD SERVICE

When a customer advises that he or she has a food allergy:

- Provide the customer with the information they need to make an informed choice.
- Ensure you are very clear on what foods are involved and answer honestly. You cannot guarantee allergen free food, but you can make the food you serve safer. If you are unsure of the customer's question, say so. Never guess... it could trigger a life threatening emergency.
- Write the customer's request clearly on the order docket and also talk to the kitchen staff about it.
- Take care that no food or liquid spills onto the allergen free meal from another plate.
- Tell the customer what you have done to reduce the risk of an allergen being present in the food item.

It is the customer's responsibility to advise service staff that they have a food allergy.

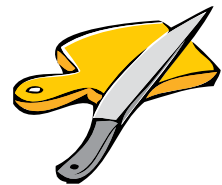


AVOID CROSS CONTAMINATION

Cross contamination occurs when food containing allergens comes into contact with food that does not.

Examples might include:

- A food handler using the same cutting board to cut a peanut butter sandwich, and then a ham sandwich



- A baker making muffins that contain eggs, then using the same unwashed mixer to mix a dough without eggs



- A chef preparing cooked prawns and then cutting lettuce without first washing hands thoroughly



WHAT TO DO IF A CUSTOMER HAS AN ALLERGIC REACTION



CALL 000

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive...

- Lay person flat, do not stand or walk. If breathing is difficult allow to sit.
- Follow customer's Action Plan for Anaphylaxis (if they have one) and administer adrenaline autoinjector (EpiPen® or Anapen®) as per instructions on the Action Plan.

ALLERGY AWARENESS IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Attending to a customer's allergy requests is not only your legal obligation, it can help build customer loyalty and be good for business.

Here are some examples:



Good customer experience

A customer calls ahead to an Italian restaurant to advise them of his milk allergy. The waitress notes his request, his food allergy and his booking time. She says she will speak with the chef and call him back if there is a problem.

When the family arrives at the restaurant, the customer tells the waitress he is the person with the milk allergy. He orders plain steamed vegetables, boiled pasta (without butter) and fish of the day.

The waitress discusses the order with the chef and returns with a packet of pasta for the customer to check. He approves the ingredients and asks for the fish to be grilled on a piece of foil to help prevent cross contamination.

The waitress tells the man the chef is cooking his food separately with clean utensils including a clean knife and cutting board. She writes **MILK ALLERGY** on his final order and takes it to the chef.

The chef reviews the order, and thinking the meal seems a bit bland, heads to the table to ask the customer if he would like chilli sauce on the side. He accepts the offer.

When delivering the meal, the waitress explains what the chef has done to reduce risk. When dessert is offered, the customer is told fruit is the only choice available to him.



Bad customer experience

A woman with a peanut allergy discovers that a Peking Duck dish she ordered has the meat lying on a bed of peanuts. This is despite being assured by a waiter earlier that the dish was peanut free.

After complaining, the meal is taken away and returned. The woman sees no peanuts and starts eating the meal.

After a few mouthfuls, a friend suggests she check the bottom of her plate in case the peanuts were simply scraped off. The woman finds peanut crumbs at the base of her meal.

Fearing she is about to have an allergic reaction, the woman reaches for her adrenaline autoinjector.

ALLERGY AWARE CHECKLIST

Here's a handy checklist you can tear out and place on your workplace notice board or laminate for your kitchen:

1

Know your products

- Only accept correctly labelled foods.
- Check all ingredients even in sauces, spices, garnish, oils, dressings etc for allergens.
- Avoid ingredient substitution.

2

Educate your staff

- Train and test your staff regularly in food safety, hygiene and allergen awareness.
- Teach staff of their obligation to declare certain allergens.
- Display 'allergy aware' posters.

3

Ensure good preparation and hygiene practices

- Always double check the ingredients with the chef.
- Handle food safely. Start fresh for meals that must be allergen free.
- Clean and sanitise work surfaces, utensils and other food-contact items between foods. Even trace amounts can be harmful.
- Store food safely.
- Have a dedicated area for preparing allergen free meals (be aware that food that is safe for one person with a food allergy may be unsafe for another person with food allergy).
- Whenever possible, prepare foods for people with food allergy first.

4

Communicate with your customers

- Take customer requests about allergens seriously. Listen carefully.
- Give customers accurate information about the content of meals if they ask.
- Have a specific protocol to follow if a customer says they are allergic.
- Place the name of known allergens next to menu items.

For more detailed information

Purchase Anaphylaxis Australia's 'Food Service Kit' and allergy aware posters, available at: www.allergyfacts.org.au

NSW Food Authority www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au 1300 552 406

Anaphylaxis Australia www.allergyfacts.org.au 1300 728 000