

FOOD ALLERGY MANAGEMENT FOR FOOD BUSINESSES

Food Act 2006
Food Standards Code

Food allergies can be life threatening. For people who have a food allergy, the only way to manage the allergy is to avoid the food allergen. For this reason there are laws in place, for example, mandatory labelling, to help people who have a food allergy avoid food allergens.

DECLARED FOOD ALLERGENS

Declared food allergens in Australia include:

- » wheat
- » peanuts
- » soy
- » milk
- » eggs
- » tree nuts
- » crustacea
- » sesame
- » fish
- » lupin
- » sulphites (in concentrations of 10mg/kg or more).

WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein that the body mistakenly believes is harmful. When the individual eats food containing that protein, the immune system releases massive amounts of chemicals, triggering symptoms that can affect a person's breathing, gastrointestinal tract, skin and/or heart.

WHAT IS A FOOD INTOLERANCE?

Many people think they are allergic to a food when in fact they are intolerant. Unlike food allergies, intolerances do not involve the body's immune system. Slower in onset and not life threatening, food intolerance symptoms include headaches, bloating, wind, nausea, diarrhea, mouth ulcers or hives.

ARE FOOD ALLERGIES COMMON?

Food allergies can occur at any age. They occur in around 5-10% of children and 2-4% of adults in Australia and New Zealand. Most food allergies in children are not severe, and children have been known to grow out of them over time.

SYMPTOMS OF FOOD ALLERGIES

Signs of mild or moderate allergic reaction:

- » stomach pain
- » diarrhoea
- » vomiting
- » itchy skin
- » rash/hives
- » swelling of face, lips or eyes.

Signs of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)

- » difficult/noisy breathing
- » wheezing or coughing
- » swelling of tongue
- » swelling/tightness in throat
- » pale and floppy (most common in young children)
- » dizziness or collapse.

WHAT IS 'ANAPHYLAXIS'?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life-threatening. It must be treated as a medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment and urgent medical attention. Anaphylaxis usually occurs within 20 minutes to 2 hours of exposure to the food allergen and can rapidly become life threatening. Approximately 10 people die from anaphylactic reactions each year in Australia.

PLANNING AROUND FOOD ALLERGENS

- » Implement an effective food allergen management program.
- » Educate staff in food allergen risks, management and communication.
- » Provide customers with clear, up-to-date and accurate information on the food allergen status of the foods you provide.
- » Avoid cross-contamination and unintentional presence of food allergens.
- » Assist customers who have a food allergy with appropriate food menu choices by providing information about food allergens that may be present directly and/or indirectly in food items.
- » Consider developing an allergen matrix, see example on page 2.

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PREVENT CROSS-CONTAMINATION

When handling foods that contain allergens, take extra care not to contaminate other foods or equipment.

Set aside a work area and equipment that is used solely for the preparation of allergen-free foods.

Ensure staff clean and sanitise all equipment and surfaces that come into contact with allergens. Include special instructions in your cleaning schedule to prevent cross-contamination during cleaning.

Customer requests

Always take requests and questions from customers seriously and remember the four R's:

- » REVIEW the food allergy concerns in detail with the customer.
- » REFER the food allergy concerns to the chef, manager or person in charge.
- » REMEMBER to check the preparation procedure for potential cross-contamination, as well as ingredient labels.
- » RESPOND back to the customer and inform them of your findings.

After passing on required information, always let the customer make their own informed choice about what menu item to order.

FOOD LABELLING REQUIREMENTS

The Food Standards Code requires the declared food allergens be declared on labels whenever they are present as ingredients or as components of food additives or processing aids.

If the food is not in a package or is not required to have a label (for example, food prepared at and sold from a takeaway shop), this information must either be displayed in connection with the food or provided to the purchaser if requested.

For further information about food labelling contact the Department of Health on 13 QGOV (13 74 68) or visit the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website www.foodstandards.gov.au.

USEFUL RESOURCES

www.allergy.org.au
www.allergyfacts.org.au

MORE INFORMATION

If you require further information, visit Council's website townsville.qld.gov.au, or call Council's Customer Service Centre on 13 48 10.

Example of an allergen matrix

Note: The same deep fryer is used for Crustacea and chips; therefore, the chips will have traces of Crustacea.

Menu \ Allergen	Wheat	Peanuts	Soy	Milk	Eggs	Tree nuts	Crustacea	Sesame	Fish	Lupin	Sulphites
Entrees											
Garlic Bread	✓			✓							
Chicken Wings											
Mains											
Seafood basket	✓						✓		✓		
Fish & Chips	✓						Traces		✓		
Hot chips							Traces				
Caesar salad	✓			✓	✓						
Dessert											
Ice-cream				✓							
Carrot Cake	✓			✓	✓	✓					