

# Allergens in food service

Food allergy is very serious, causing illness and even death. Food allergies occur in around 1 in 20 children and 1 in 50 adults. The most severe allergic reaction is known as anaphylaxis – which is potentially life threatening.

Most people who have severe food allergic reactions in Australia have them when eating food prepared by another person. Reactions and fatalities have occurred as a result of food purchased in food service businesses.

## Food allergens

Even very small amounts of an allergen in food can trigger a reaction. The most common things that trigger reactions in Australia are listed in the [Food Standards Code](#) Standard 1.2.3:

- > Peanuts
- > Milk and milk products
- > Crustaceans (shellfish)
- > Sesame seeds
- > Lupin
- > Cereals containing gluten namely, wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt and their hybridised strains
- > Added sulphites (in amounts greater than 10mg/Kg)
- > Tree nuts
- > Egg
- > Fish
- > Soybeans

## Providing allergen information – it's the law

Consumers have a legal right to receive written or verbal information on allergen content if they ask for it when buying food. This is a requirement of the Food Act 2001 and the Food Standards Code. Penalties for falsely describing food which causes harm to a person may result in large fines or imprisonment up to four years.

Be honest and be accurate, take food allergy seriously. A food business is not obliged to provide an allergen free meal to a customer unless the business agrees to, but there are steps that can be taken to reduce the risks to your customers.

Each business will have a different way to control allergens, but as a guide:

### **LISTEN and be TRUTHFUL**

- > Take customer requests about allergens seriously. Listen carefully.
- > Give accurate information about the food and its ingredients.
- > Have a procedure and policies in place for food requests made by allergic customers. This may mean that they advise customers they are unable to cater for special dietary requirements.
- > Be honest about what the business can provide, especially if there are allergens being used in the kitchen.
- > Have a note on your menu asking customers to ALWAYS disclose their food allergy before ordering.

### **KNOW what's in your food**

- > Regularly check your supplier's ingredient labels as these can change over time. Look for hidden allergens in commonly used ingredients e.g. vegetable oil containing peanuts.
- > When consumers disclose their food allergy, the food business has a responsibility to be familiar with all the ingredients as some may be made from one or more food allergen which may not be obvious from the name eg casein is a milk product



## PREPARE food safely

- > Wash your hands and always use clean gloves. Put on a clean apron if one is available.
- > Store ingredients carefully and stick to the recipes when making food. Remember, if you re-use oil for deep frying, be sure it has not been used to cook allergen containing foods.
- > When preparing an allergen safe meal ensure the preparation area and all equipment in contact with the food is thoroughly cleaned with a clean cloth and warm soapy water. This includes grills, pots and pans. Some businesses choose to use dedicated equipment for the preparation of certain allergen free meals.
- > Have a clear way of identifying the meal for the person with food allergy. The business can use any method that works for you, but some examples are coloured toothpick for plated meals or stickers for wrapped foods).
- > Carry the allergen free meal out to the customer without other meals, to prevent any cross contamination from spillages from one plate to another. Ensure the right meal goes to the right person.

## EDUCATE your staff – UNDERSTAND the consequences

- > Train all staff in food allergen risks, management, communication and the consequences of serving up a contaminated meal to an allergic customer. Free training is available at <https://foodallergytraining.org.au/> or <http://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/>
- > All staff should be aware when an allergen free meal is being prepared. This helps minimise cross-contamination risks. Even tiny amounts of contaminants can cause an allergic reaction

## Resources

- > [https://nationalallergystrategy.org.au/images/doc/Allergy\\_aware\\_checklist.pdf](https://nationalallergystrategy.org.au/images/doc/Allergy_aware_checklist.pdf)
- > [https://nationalallergystrategy.org.au/images/doc/All\\_about\\_Allergens\\_Brochure\\_FA.pdf](https://nationalallergystrategy.org.au/images/doc/All_about_Allergens_Brochure_FA.pdf)
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- > <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/foodallergenportal/Pages/default.aspx>

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## For more information

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