



# Food Allergy – Creating safer food choices

## What you need to know if you work with food

This leaflet is for proprietors and food handlers who work in a wide variety of food businesses such as a cafe, take-away, restaurant or in a food business selling unpackaged foods such as sandwiches, loose bread rolls, cakes and deli products.

## Why food allergy matters

When someone has a food allergy, eating the smallest amount of food can be life-threatening. So, if you serve food to customers who have informed you that they have a food allergy you need ensure you provide them with accurate information so they can make an informed choice about level of risk.

Attending to a customer's food allergy request is legally required under the Food Act 2008 (WA). It can help build customer loyalty and be good for business. Consumers have a legal right to receive, on request, written or verbal information on allergen content when buying takeaway foods or eating out.

### Overall goal

Protect food allergic customers from food allergens by providing accurate information about the ingredients in the food and avoiding cross-contamination in the food sold by:

- Declaring the presence of allergens on food packaging
- Where the food is not required to be labelled, allergens should be:
  - Identified when displayed or
  - Declared to the purchaser upon request
- Managing food preparation and display to prevent cross-contamination
- Thoroughly cleaning and sanitising equipment and work areas

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The Food Act 2008 (WA) adopts the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). Standard 1.2.3 of the Code specifies that the presence of the certain substances in food (listed in the boxes below), must be declared when present as an ingredient; or an ingredient of a compound ingredient; or a food additive or component of a food additive; or a processing aid or component of a processing aid. More information about the Code is available at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx>

## Which foods can cause a problem?

Foods that most frequently cause allergic reactions include those listed below, and more than 90% of serious reactions are caused by these foods. These **must** be declared. Cereals containing gluten and added sulphites must also be declared

- Crustaceans (shellfish) and their products
- Egg and egg products
- Milk and milk products
- Peanuts and peanut products
- Sesame seeds and sesame seed products
- Soybean and soybean products
- Fish and fish products, except for isinglass derived from swim bladders

- Tree nuts and tree nut products other than coconut from the fruit of the palm *Cocos nucifera*
- Cereals containing gluten and their products, namely, wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt and their hybridised strains (other than where these substances are present in beer and spirits described in Standards 2.7.2 and 2.7.5 of the Code)

Other foods can cause allergic reactions including poppy seeds, mustard seeds, kiwifruit, avocado, banana, rice, legumes (chickpeas, beans, lentils, peas etc), spices and many others. Although mandatory labelling does not apply to these foods, food businesses still need to be able to provide accurate information about the ingredients in foods or meals.

If you prepare food or cook a dish to order, you should be able to identify what has gone into it. Use the recipe, ingredient labels and information provided by your suppliers to understand what allergens are present and what allergens may be present. Remember even the smallest trace amount of certain allergenic foods may trigger a severe reaction in the most sensitive people. So do what is manageable to reduce the risk of trace amounts being present from cross-contamination from food handlers, food surfaces, contact with other foods, utensils and equipment used for other dishes.

Information sheets for the most common food allergens are a useful guide for dietary avoidance of a specific food allergen and are available from Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) website [www.allergy.org.au/patients/food-allergy/ascia-dietary-avoidance-for-food-allergy](http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/food-allergy/ascia-dietary-avoidance-for-food-allergy) and from Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia website <http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/living-with-the-risk/allergen-specifics>

## 9 tips for food businesses on food allergen declarations

### PLAN

Have a **plan** in place to cater for customers who phone ahead or ask at the counter/table whether a food is free of a particular food allergen, or whether the chef can accommodate their allergen avoidance requirements

### BE ACCURATE

If you list food allergen ingredients on a card, label or menu, make sure this information is accurate and up to date

### TRACES OF FOOD ALLERGENS

When making food, ensure you know what is in all of the ingredients you use, including cooking oils, dressings, stocks, thickeners, toppings, sauces and garnishes. In addition, you can't simply take out the pieces of food allergen

### HIDDEN ALLERGENS

Foods containing allergens are not always obvious. For example, hummus usually contains 'tahini', which is made from sesame seeds, and Macadamia nuts have been found in mashed potato.

### NEVER GUESS

If someone requests food that does not contain a certain ingredient, **never** guess. Always check the ingredients carefully and follow the food business plan for dealing with customer allergen avoidance requests. If you are still uncertain, inform the customer.

### HYGIENE

If you are making food for someone with a food allergy, make sure your hands are washed thoroughly before preparing that food, wear a clean apron, and ensure work surfaces, equipment and utensils have been thoroughly cleaned

### TRAINING

Train all of your staff particularly food handlers about food allergies and the consequences of allergic reactions. Inform staff what to do when a customer asks about allergens in food. Specify which staff members can give the customer the information they need, or talk to the customer about foods they can eat from the menu. Employee awareness and training is critical to avoid consumers with food allergy being exposed to the unintentional or undeclared presence of allergens in a product

### ALWAYS CHECK INGREDIENTS

Always check the ingredients before you start preparing food for someone with an allergy, as recipes and products can change. If ingredients do change, make food handlers aware and make sure written records are up-to-date. Make sure whoever prepares food understands there may be other names associated with food allergens, such as milk products labelled as 'whey'

### SYSTEM FOR ORDERING

Ensure a clear system exists 'front-of-house' for marking an order to notify the chef and other food handlers that a meal needs to exclude particular food allergen(s)



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