



Food allergens

Despite food allergies affecting only a small proportion of the population, risk management and mandatory product labelling for the key food allergens are critical food safety matters for businesses in the food industry.

Food allergens are typically naturally-occurring proteins in foods or derivatives of them that cause abnormal immune responses. In Australia and New Zealand there are 10 foods or food groups that cause about 90% of all allergic reactions: peanuts & tree nuts; soy; sulphites; milk, egg; cereals; seafood; fish; sesame and lupin.

Allergic reactions to foods vary greatly from mild gastrointestinal discomfort, to skin rashes and potentially life threatening asthma and anaphylaxis.

There is currently no cure for food allergies but effective care and emergency treatments are available. The only successful method to manage a food allergy is avoidance of all foods containing the allergen.

Allergen Management

To ensure that foods are safe and suitable for consumption, there are a number of controls which businesses can implement to reduce those risks associated with allergens.

Such controls include:

- Ensuring all staff are trained in allergen awareness;
- Developing an allergen matrix (see below) which is kept onsite and accessible to all staff;
- Checking that all incoming goods are adequately labelled with ingredient and allergen information;

- Maintaining clear verbal and written communication between staff for any allergen related orders;
- Strict food preparation procedures for allergen related orders to prevent cross-contamination; and
- Adequately labelling all pre-packaged foods prepared onsite with allergen information.

This list is not exhaustive and each business should consider additional controls that may be relevant to their specific food processes.

Allergen Matrix

In accordance with the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code, food that is unpackaged or is not required to have a label, must have allergen information displayed in connection with the food or otherwise be able to provide the information to the purchaser upon request (verbally or in writing).

To meet this requirement it is recommended that food businesses develop an allergen matrix which is a document used to record all menu items sold onsite which references any particular allergens that may be contained in each item.

Attached is a labelling matrix template, it is recommended that this template be filled out, updated regularly and kept onsite at all times so that it can be accessed by staff when receiving enquiries.

Further Information

For further information about food allergen management, please contact the Environmental Health Unit on (03) 5261 0600 or visit the following websites:

- Department of Health Victoria - <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-allergen-awareness>
- Food Standards Code Australia and New Zealand - www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies
- Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia - www.allergyfacts.org.au/
- The Allergen Bureau - www.allergenbureau.net/

Online Training

The All about Allergens course provides information about responding to customers that disclose a food allergy, managing orders for those with food allergy, minimising the risk of cross-contamination, and it also provides examples of good and poor service for customers with food allergy. The course also educates users on the symptoms of a food allergic reaction, and explains what to do if a customer experiences an allergic reaction including anaphylaxis. The All about Allergens online training aims to provide fast, easy and free access to accurate and consistent training for all staff working in food service. The online training and supporting resources can be accessed from the following link: www.foodallergytraining.org.au

