

Food businesses and allergens

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.

Food businesses must be aware of their responsibility to declare or manage allergens, or the requirement to recall, or the requirement to quarantine recalled products.

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, and from undeclared allergens in packaged foods. In Australia the majority of recalls are due to undeclared allergens in packaged foods. Visit the [FSANZ recall page](#) for up to date information.

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 information to consumers

Information about allergens can be provided by:

- > providing information about food allergens in food if requested by a customer (food service such as restaurants, cafes, takeaway)
- > declaring allergens on the label (usually in the ingredient list)
- > displaying information about allergens next to food on sale (if it's not packaged)
- > providing information with the food (food sold for catering purposes, or where food is not in a package)

If a business doesn't provide this information, or if an allergen is found in food that was not declared on the label, they may be breaking the law, and putting the consumer at risk of illness, injury, or even death.

Information for specific sectors

- > Fact sheet – Allergen labelling for manufacturers, retailers, caterers, importers, home businesses and food sold at markets
- > Fact sheet – Allergens in Food Service



Useful websites for food allergen information

There are extensive resources available for food businesses regarding allergens, with these being the most relevant for food businesses.

About allergens

National Allergy Strategy <http://www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au/>

This organisation exists to improve the health and quality of life of Australians with allergic diseases, and minimise the burden of allergic diseases on individuals, their carers, healthcare services and the community. It has extensive free downloadable resources.

Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia <http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/>

This organisation supports individuals and carers in managing allergy and anaphylaxis. It has extensive free downloadable resources.

FSANZ Food allergen portal

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/foodallergenportal/Pages/default.aspx>

This food allergen portal was created by the Allergen Collaboration to provide different sectors in the community with links to best practice food allergen resources and key messages to promote in the different sectors.

Food service allergen training

National Allergy Strategy www.foodallergytraining.org.au

A free online training package for food service. A certificate is available on completion of this 1.5 hour long course. Extensive food allergen management resources for all types of food business, including hospitals, schools and child care centres.

Do food safely <http://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/index.php/en/>

DoFoodSafely is a free, non-accredited, online learning program provided by the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria and proudly supported by Queensland Health and South Australia Health.

For food manufacturers and industry

The VITAL Program <http://www.allergenbureau.net/vital/>

VITAL (Voluntary Incidental Trace Allergen Labelling program) is a standardised allergen risk assessment process for food industry. It assists food manufacturers to assess ingredients and processing conditions that contribute towards the allergen status of the finished product. There are also resources to explain allergen labelling.

National Measurement Institute (NMI)

www.measurement.gov.au/Services/FoodTesting/Pages/AllergenandIntoleranceProteins.aspx

The National Measurement Institute is an Australian laboratory which can test foods for the presence of allergens.

For more information

**Food Standard Surveillance
Public Health Services
11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000**

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety



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Allergens in food service

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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/All_about_Allergens_Brochure_FA.pdf
- > https://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Documents/retail/be_prepared_be_allergy_aware.pdf
- > https://allergyfacts.org.au/images/pdf/The_usual_suspects_AA003_Poster_FA.pdf
- > <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/foodallergenportal/Pages/default.aspx>

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Allergen labelling

In Australia the majority of recalls are due to undeclared allergens in packaged foods. This information is for food businesses that must be aware of labelling requirements eg manufacturers, importers, retailers, caterers, home businesses and food sold at markets.

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Labelling requirements

Different requirements may apply to how food is labelled. Refer to the [Food Standards Code](#) PART 1.2 Labelling and other information requirements.

This fact sheet provides general information for businesses that are required to provide labelling, but it is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure they are correctly labelling products.

Packaged foods

Food businesses that make or import packaged foods must meet the labelling requirements for allergens set out in Standard 1.2.3 (Warning Statements, Advisory Statements and Declarations) of the Code.

There are different ways allergens may be declared on a food package label:

- > In brackets: wheat flour (contains wheat and gluten), sugar, butter (contains milk), salt, flavour (contains wheat starch). May contain traces of nuts.
- > In bold: **wheat** flour (contains **wheat** and **gluten**), sugar, butter (contains **milk**), salt, flavour (contains **wheat** starch). May contain traces of **nuts**.
- > In a separate declaration: for example, Ingredients: wheat flour, sugar, butter, salt, flavour. Allergen warning: wheat, gluten and milk. May contain traces of nuts.

Other ways a business may label allergens include:

- > “Contains” means the product contains the ingredient and is intended as an ingredient.
- > “Allergen ingredient free” labelling claims for “free” may only be made where a food contains no detectable trace, for example, “Gluten Free” or “Dairy Free” [Standard 1.2.8].
- > “May contain” means that during harvest, storage or manufacture, the product may have been unintentionally cross contaminated with an allergen and the product may be a risk to the allergic consumer. These statements are not a regulatory requirement, but a business may use them to provide extra information to the consumer.

Where a packaged food is found to have an undeclared allergen, a recall or withdrawal will be required. Fines can apply under the *Food Act 2001*.



The type of businesses that must comply with these labelling requirements include:

- > **Manufacturers:** Manufacturers are responsible for managing the presence of food allergens and ensuring their products are clearly and accurately labelled.
- > **Importers:** Importers are responsible for ensuring their imports are properly labelled in accordance with Australian labelling legislation and for providing clear and accurate information about the allergen status of their product.
- > **Home businesses and market stalls:** All food businesses must comply with the Food Standards Code. Be allergy aware and either label packaged food as required by the Food Standards Code, or have allergen information available for unpackaged foods, or foods not required to have a label. Information can be found here:
 - o <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodsafety/standards/Pages/Home-based-food-businesses.aspx>
 - o <https://farmersmarkets.org.au/wp-content/uploads/AFMA-Farmers-Market-Food-Safety-Guide-Aug-15.pdf>

Food that is exempt from bearing a label

- > **Retail:** Where a food for sale is not required to have a label (eg a bakery where the products are made and packaged on the premises where it is sold, or an assisted display cabinet, or where the food is packaged in the presence of the purchaser), product information such as ingredients and allergens must be available and either:
 - o displayed on or in connection with the display of food; or,
 - o provided to the purchaser upon request either verbally or in writing.

When a customer identifies that they have a dietary requirement such as a food allergy or intolerance, you have a legal responsibility to help the customer by providing accurate information about what the food is made from. You must specify whether any ingredients contain allergens or may contain allergens. This means staff should always consult with their supervisor about the existence of allergens present in the foods sold to ensure that correct information is provided.

- > **Caterers:** Foods sold for catering purposes has some very specific labelling requirements set out in the Food Standards Code, and information about allergens must always be on the label or accompany the food.

Responsibility to recall

All food businesses engaged in wholesale supply, manufacture or importation of food must have a system in place to ensure the recall of unsafe food [Standard 3.2.2-12]. If labelling fails to declare the allergens that are present, the food business must recall the affected product.

Information about how to recall food can be found on the FSANZ website

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/industry/foodrecalls/conduct/Pages/HowToRecallFood.aspx>

An Industry Protocol is also available:

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/industry/foodrecalls/firp/Pages/default.aspx>

Visit the [FSANZ recall page](#) for up to date information.

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