Allergen special

Size of the problem:

Food allergies affect 1 in 20 children and 1 in 50 adults.

(allergyfacts.org.au)

Signs and symptoms:

The signs and symptoms of a food allergic reaction may occur almost immediately after eating or most often within 20 minutes to two hours after eating. Rapid onset and development of potentially life threatening symptoms are characteristic markers of anaphylaxis.

Allergic symptoms may initially appear mild or moderate but can progress very quickly. The most dangerous allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) involve the respiratory system (breathing) and/or cardiovascular system (heart and blood pressure).

Mild to moderate allergic reaction

- Hives, welts or body redness
- Swelling of the face, lips, eyes
- Vomiting, abdominal pain (these are signs of a severe allergic reaction/anaphylaxis in someone with severe insect allergy)
- Tingling of the mouth

Severe allergic reaction-ANAPHYLAXIS

- Difficult and/or noisy breathing
- Swelling of the tongue
- Swelling or tightness in the throat
- Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (in young children)

In 2013 a boy’s near-fatal allergic reaction to ice-cream has led to one of the largest fines for a food offence involving allergies in Australia, and spurred his mother to campaign for major reforms to the restaurant and catering industry.

A magistrates’ court in Melbourne fined the catering company $55,000 for serving the eight year old boy a frozen dessert that a waiter “guaranteed” was dairy-free. It was in fact vanilla ice-cream.
Allergy management

Some foods and food ingredients or their components can cause severe allergic reactions that is known as anaphylaxis, which is potentially life threatening. For a customer with food allergy, consuming even a small amount of the food they are allergic to, can cause an allergic reaction.

Most food allergies are caused by:
- cereals containing gluten and their products – namely, wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt, and their hybrid strains
- shellfish (crustacea and molluscs) and their products
- fish and fish products
- egg and egg products
- dairy, including milk and milk products (including milk proteins)
- peanuts and peanut products
- tree nuts (Almonds, Brazil nuts, Cashews, Hazelnuts, Hickory nuts, Macadamia nuts, Pecans, Pine nuts, Pistachios and Walnuts etc.) and tree nut products (marzipan, nut butters, oils, flavourings and syrups) – does not include coconut and chestnuts.
- sesame seeds and sesame seed products
- soybean and soybean products
- added sulfites in concentrations of 10 mg/kg or more
- lupin.

As a food business, the law requires you to provide accurate information when a customer asks about allergens in foods you are serving.

**Packaged food** – the Food Standards Code requires these foods to be declared on labels whenever they are present as ingredients or as components of food additives or processing aids.

**Unpackaged food** – customers that buy food from food services businesses such as a bakery, café or restaurant must be able to buy food that will not harm them. Allergen advisory statements and declarations must be stated in labelling that is displayed in connection with the display of the food or provided to the purchaser on request.

The Code also states that food businesses must take reasonable measures to ensure they do not compromise the safety and suitability of food. For example, by keeping preparation areas and equipment separate, and ensuring equipment is properly cleaned so that non-allergenic food is not mixed in with allergenic food.

Possible ways an allergen incident may occur include:
- allergen containing food not labelled or information not provided to the customer when requested
- miscommunication between staff (e.g. wait staff to kitchen staff)
- poor process control measures (e.g. during preparation, storage, cross contamination)
- inadequate or incorrect labelling from supplier
- changes in recipe and/or ingredients.

All about Allergens free online training

This 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: foodallergytraining.org.au

**USA:** a 15-year-old girl from Weston, Florida, with a peanut allergy and asthma, died following a severe reaction to peanut-containing food.

Her mother explained that her daughter was at a friend’s home when she made a fatal mistake of eating a cookie, one that turned out to have an image on the package indicating these particular cookies contained peanut butter.

The teen began to feel tingling in her mouth and came home. However, the severe anaphylactic reaction quickly progressed and her mother said the girl stopped breathing and fell unconscious. “We administered two EpiPens while she was conscious and waited on paramedics for what felt like an eternity”. Her daughter died within an hour and a half of eating the cookie.

“The company has different colored packaging to indicate chunky, chewy, or regular but NO screaming warnings about such a fatal ingredient to many people,” said the girl's mother, who shared this information to warn others “so this horrible mistake doesn’t happen again.”
Anaphylaxis Notifications

Changes to the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 now require all Victorian hospitals to notify the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) of anyone attending the hospital with an anaphylaxis reaction. The changes came into effect on 1 November 2018.

Hospitals are now required to notify DHHS of anaphylaxis presentations within five days of initial diagnosis unless the suspected cause of anaphylaxis is the consumption of a packaged food. In this case, notification is required immediately by telephone.

Why are anaphylaxis notifications from hospitals being implemented?

The amendments were introduced by the Minister for Health in response to a Victorian Coronial report regarding the tragic death of a 10 year old Victorian boy in 2013. The boy was allergic (anaphylactic) to milk (dairy) products, and drank a can of imported coconut drink which failed to declare the presence of milk as an ingredient on its label, in breach of Australian food labelling law.

Without adequate warning of the contents of the drink, the boy’s parents unwittingly gave the drink to their son, who, shortly after consuming it, suffered an anaphylactic reaction that ultimately claimed his life (see case study below).

At the time, the responding hospital was not required to notify the department of the suspicions that the coconut drink was the suspected cause of the boy’s anaphylactic reaction. As a result the product remained in the marketplace for six weeks before being recalled from the shelves, putting other milk-allergic consumers at risk.

Victorian Coroner Audrey Jamieson has reported on the death of a 10-year-old milk allergic boy who died after consuming a Taiwanese coconut water that contained an undeclared dairy protein. Her recommendations included the mandatory reporting by doctors at hospitals of all cases reporting anaphylaxis or acute allergy.

The keen soccer player from Burwood East had a fatal reaction after he consumed the drink on the evening of 13 December 2013.

His parents turned off his life-support on 20 December.

The Sydney-based company which imported the drink from Taiwan, pleaded guilty to three charges under the Food Act and was fined $18,000, in addition to being ordered to pay the NSW Food Authority costs of $24,000.

New Team Members

Our New Coordinator Public Health ~ Leanne Johnson

Leanne Johnson has returned to the City of Greater Dandenong as the new Coordinator Public Health. Leanne spent 10 years with Council before developing her career with the State Government and other councils in Victoria.

New EHO ~ Kim Hoang

Kim joins the team on a part-time basis and will be available on Monday, Tuesday and Friday. She will be looking after Area 3 (Dandenong North and Noble Park North) with Susy until 1 January 2019 when all the officers will change the area they look after.

Kim has worked for a number of councils in Victoria for over 17 years.
Allergen labelling saves lives and can mean the difference between life and death for people with food allergies.

Importers must ensure that they meet the mandatory allergen labelling requirements in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code specifies the allergens that must be on food labels. If the food is not in a package or is not required to have a label (for example, bulk containers), allergen information must accompany the consignment so the business purchasing the food has access to the allergen information.

If you import food you are responsible for understanding and meeting mandatory allergen labelling requirements.

Many food recalls occur because food businesses have not labelled allergens correctly. Meeting mandatory allergen labelling requirements can save lives. But meeting the requirements can also mean you avoid having to conduct a food recall, saving your business time and money.

**What importers need to do**

Importers should review products they import and ensure the labelling meets the mandatory allergen labelling requirements. This may mean contacting overseas suppliers and requesting them to provide information and assurances as to whether any allergens are present. Importers should educate supply partners on the allergens to avoid health incidents and non-compliance. Importers can also consider analysing the product to verify any assurances provided by overseas suppliers.

In considering whether allergens must be declared, importers should ensure that suppliers are aware of the difference between mandatory allergen labelling and any biosecurity requirements for the presence of particular foods. For example, a declaration that a food contains less than 5% egg does not necessarily mean that the food does not contain egg.

**Importation of food which poses a risk to human health is an offence**

Importers must be aware that the presence of undeclared allergens poses a risk to human health for people with food allergies. Under section 8 of the Imported Food Control Act 1992, it is an offence to import food into Australia if the importer knows, or ought reasonably to have known, that it poses a risk to human health. The offence carries a penalty of imprisonment for up to 10 years.

**Allergen Related Food Recalls from January 2018**

The presence of allergens is now the largest cause of food recalls in Australia. From January to October there have been 30 food recalls due to the presence of one or more undeclared allergens in a product. Up from 26 in 2017. Here is the breakdown by month:

**January**
- Potato Salad (gluten)
- Basil Pesto (cashew)
- Rice Sticks Vegetable Flavour (gluten)
- Fruit Mince Tarts (pistachio)
- Coconut Milk Powder (milk)

**February**
- Plain Puppodums (gluten)
- Banana Loaf (egg)
- Bread (gluten)
- Dairy and gluten free frozen dessert (pecans, hazelnuts, cashews and pistachio)
- Dark Chocolate with spiced rum (milk)

**March**
- Mango Vanilla Ice lolly (milk)
- Natural Sunflower Kernels (walnuts)
- Organic Hemp Vegan Protein (soy)

**April**
- Sugar Free Dark Chocolate (milk)
- Honey Soy Flavoured Tofu (peanut)

**May**
- Almond, Cashew and Cranberry Bites (peanut)
- Creamy Caesar dressing (milk, egg and fish)

**June**
- Coconut Chocolate Butter (nut)
- Taramasalata (seafood and soy)
- Ice cream (milk and egg)

**July**
- Classic and Raspberry Snowballs (milk)
- Pancake mix (egg)
- Organic Baby Rice Cereal (gluten)
- Organic Millet Meal (gluten)

**August**
- Chocolate products (dairy)
- Thai Salad (soy)
- Clean Paprika Chicken (fish, gluten, egg and milk)
- Halva (pistachio)

**September**
- Beef Pie (egg)
- Lupin Soup (gluten)
Refreshed Food Allergen Portal — a positive step for those living with food

A new look to the FSANZ Food Allergen Portal, is the result of a collaboration between industry, consumer groups and government stakeholders. The website provides best practice resources on managing allergens in food.

Launching the portal, Food Standards Australia New Zealand CEO, Mr Mark Booth said the portal is now easier for people to navigate and access links to food allergy related resources and information.

“The portal has information for food manufacturers and retailers; the food service sector; childcare centres and schools; government organisations; health professionals and consumers,” Mr Booth said.

“Food allergies can be a matter of life and death so it is vital that each sector can easily find the best available information to help those living with food allergy. All sectors of the community need to be aware of their responsibilities and how they can help people who have a food allergy.

“This portal is an excellent example of what can happen when all stakeholders collaborate to achieve a single purpose.”

The Portal is available from the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website: foodstandards.gov.au/foodallergenportal

For more information call Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia on 1300 728 000.

Charges commonly brought against an accused for allergy offences

There are a number of offences under the Food Act 1984 that can be brought against a proprietor for selling food that causes an anaphylactic reaction in customers. Here are the main ones. Several of the indictable charges carry a prison sentence of up to 2 years or large fines.

S10(1) - **Knowingly falsely describing food – cause** (indictable charge)

S10(2) - **Knowingly falsely describing food – sell** (indictable charge)

S10A(1) - **Falsely describing food in other circumstances** - a person must not cause food intended for sale to be falsely described if the person ought reasonably to know that a consumer of the food who relies on the description is likely to suffer physical harm - (indictable charge)

S10A(2) - **Falsely describing food in other circumstances** - a person must not sell food that the person ought reasonably to know is falsely described and is likely to cause physical harm to a consumer of the food who relies on the description - (indictable charge)

S14 - **Sale of Food not complying with purchaser's demand**

**Food Standards Code**

S16(1) – FSC 3.2.2 3(1)(a) – **Food handling (skills in food safety)**

S16(1) – FSC 3.2.2 3(1)(b) – **Food handling (knowledge of food safety)**

S16(1) – FSC 3.2.2 7(1)(b)(i) – **Food processing (contamination)**

UK: A gifted university student with a dairy allergy died after eating a chicken burger marinated in butter milk at a restaurant in Manchester, an inquest has heard.

The student was out with friends when she became suddenly ill and collapsed, just minutes after eating the meal at a popular restaurant.

A friend administered her Epi-Pen to combat the allergic reaction and she was rushed to hospital. But the teenager, studying at Manchester University, suffered severe brain damage “not compatible with life”, a jury at the inquest was told. She died in hospital on 12 January 2015, three days after eating at the restaurant, the inquest at Manchester Coroner’s Court heard.
Pre-packaged foods have been linked to a string of anaphylaxis cases in Australia, prompting a warning that people with allergies are taking “significant risks” by eating the items that fill our supermarket shelves.

A study from the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute has found at least 14 cases over nine months where people had a severe allergic reaction, most likely due to contaminated packaged foods.

It has prompted calls for changes to food labelling, with doctors saying it is impossible for consumers to tell what foods have undergone screening for allergens and are likely to be safe, and those which could pose a threat.

It is presently mandatory for common allergens (such as peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, sesame and fish) to be declared on food labels as ingredients.

However only some food manufacturers disclose if there is a chance their products contain traces of allergens – known as precautionary allergen labelling.

This means in cases where there is no warning, consumers are not able to tell if it is because the product has been checked and found to be safe, or if it is because a voluntary warning has not been included.

Senior author of the study, Professor Katie Allen, said some customers also believed manufacturers used the warnings for legal reasons, rather than a real risk they may contain trace allergens – adding to the confusion and leading some to ignore the labels altogether.

“When you speak to manufacturers they say ‘look, if in doubt put a label on’, because they want to keep people safe,” she said.

Professor Allen said researchers began looking into the anaphylaxis cases with the hypothesis that reactions caused by packaged foods were relatively uncommon. But the survey of 198 health practitioners who specialise in allergies threw up unexpected results.

It found 14 cases of anaphylaxis linked to packaged foods, including eight cases where there was no precautionary labelling, or the precautionary labelling did not name the trigger food.

“We were quite surprised,” Professor Allen said. “Our study showed that anaphylaxis to undeclared allergens is not rare and it did not appear to depend on whether the product was labelled with precautionary advice.”

Food allergen contamination has been on the radar of authorities, especially after the Melbourne boy Ronak Warty died in 2013 after consuming a coconut drink later discovered to contain undeclared dairy milk.

Emi Habgood, a Year 10 student at Princes Hill Secondary College in Melbourne, said it could be stressful managing her allergies to wheat, eggs and peanuts.

The 15-year-old said while she was more likely to have a reaction to food prepared by cafes and restaurants, she did recently have a reaction to a rice biscuit that she had previously eaten with no problem.

“We kind of assumed there was a cross contamination with other things,” Ms Habgood said.

“We went over the ingredients and there was nothing there.”

Undeclared allergens were the leading reason behind food recalls in Australia and New Zealand in the last year, responsible for 26 recalls. And just this week, a batch of Leggo’s basil pesto was recalled because the label failed to declare cashew nuts.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand said some of the problems were caused by reformulation of recipes, packaging errors or accidental cross contamination.

A voluntary program called VITAL backed by the food industry has introduced consistent “may be present” warnings for cases where cross contact of food allergens can occur.

But the problem remains that consumers are unable to tell which products have been screened by the program.

Dr Lara Ford, clinical lead of the New South Wales anaphylaxis education program, said “there is nothing on the packaging to say the food has gone through the assessment process” and called for a mandatory system of “well-regulated” precautionary labelling. “In the meantime, an indication on packaging that shows a product had gone through the VITAL assessment process would be useful.”

Tom Lewis, chief executive of the Allergen Bureau which runs VITAL, said the bureau was aware of this issue and working on a certification system, where VITAL-accredited products could be identified. But a spokeswoman from Food Standards Australia New Zealand said there were no plans to make precautionary allergen labelling mandatory.

This story was found at: theage.com.au/national/pre-packaged-foods-pose-significant-risk-to-allergy-sufferers-20180123-p4yys1.html
New Country of Origin food labelling applies from 1 July 2018

The two-year transition period for businesses to the new country of origin labelling for food ended 30 June 2018. Tools and resources are available to help business understand and use the new labels correctly. Visit business.gov.au for more information.

‘Made in’ country of origin claims

- Made in Australia from 0% Australian ingredients
- Made in Australia from less than 25% Australian ingredients
- Made in Australia from more than 25% Australian ingredients
- Made in Australia from more than 50% Australian ingredients
- Made in Australia from more than 75% Australian ingredients
- Made in Australia from 100% Australian ingredients

Reminder to all Class 1 and Class 2 premises

It is a legal requirement under the Food Act to have a copy of your Food Safety Program on the premises and available for staff. All members of staff should know where it is located and what it says. For more information visit health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-businesses/food-safety-program

UK restaurateur sentenced to 6 years after peanut allergy death

Posted on 23 May 2016 by Doug Powell (barfblog.com/tags/allergy)
The owner of an Indian takeaway in North Yorkshire has been found guilty of manslaughter after a customer with a nut allergy was served a meal containing ground peanuts. The trial was told that the proprietor had cut corners by swapping the thickening agent almond powder for the cheaper groundnut powder, which contained peanuts.

Since December 2014, takeaways and restaurants in the UK have been required by law to let customers know if any of the most dangerous allergens are ingredients in their food.

The customer, who suffered an anaphylactic shock after eating a meal from the restaurant, died before the change in the law, but the trial heard he had flagged up his peanut allergy to the restaurant and his meal had been labelled as “nut free”.

Another customer with a nut allergy had to be treated at a hospital after eating at the defendant’s restaurant three weeks before the customer’s death. Like him, she had been assured her meal would not contain nuts, prosecutors said.

The proprietor was convicted of manslaughter by gross negligence in the death of the customer, and six food safety offenses. He was sentenced to six years in prison. He had a “reckless and cavalier attitude to risk,” the prosecutor told a jury at Teesside Crown Court. It marked the first time in Britain that someone has been convicted of manslaughter over the sale of food.
Did you spot any changes to the last edition of Flavours?

We have now started using recycled paper so it’s a little less glossy but a lot more sustainable!