Stirritup

A GUIDE TO:

# MANAGING ALLERGENS

CREED

THE FOODSERVICE COMPANY

MANAGING ALLERGENS IN CATERING:

# *A Practical Guide for* FOODSERVICE PROFESSIONALS

This guide should provide a solid foundation for managing allergens in your catering business. Following these practices ensures that you're not only complying with legal obligations but also offering a safer dining experience for all your guests.

## UNDERSTANDING FOOD ALLERGIES: A GROWING CONCERN

Food allergies are on the rise, with 6% of UK adults, or 2.4 million people, diagnosed with a food allergy[1]. Among children, the numbers are even higher, with around 1 in 13 affected—equivalent to roughly two kids in every classroom[2]. Alarmingly, hospital admissions for severe food allergies in England have more than doubled in the last two decades, and food-related anaphylaxis is on the rise, seeing a 14.5% increase last year alone[3].

As a caterer, understanding and managing food allergies is not just a legal responsibility but a crucial aspect of ensuring customer safety. With an increasing number of consumers reporting food-related reactions, you need a clear, actionable plan to handle allergens in your kitchen.

**Anaphylactic food reactions increased by**

**377%**

**between 2007 and 2016[4]**

**Anaphylaxis is on the rise, seeing a**

**14.5%**

**increase last year alone[5]**

[1] www.food.gov.uk [2] www.food.gov.uk [3, 5] www.gov.uk, www.digital.nhs.uk [4] www.foodallergy.org/resources/facts-and-statistics

## LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CATERERS

Caterers are legally required to provide accurate allergen information for 14 key allergens, which must be clearly visible and easily accessible. Whether listed on menus, boards, or shared verbally by trained staff, allergen information must be accurate and updated regularly. Failure to comply with the Food Information Regulations 2014 can lead to fines and other legal consequences.

**The 14 allergens include:**

- Celery
- Gluten-containing cereals (e.g., barley, oats)
- Crustaceans (e.g., prawns, crabs)
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk
- Molluscs (e.g., mussels, oysters)
- Mustard
- Peanuts
- Sesame
- Soybeans
- Sulphur dioxide/ sulphites (over 10ppm)
- Tree nuts (e.g. almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts)

# MANAGING ALLERGEN INFORMATION AND CROSS-CONTAMINATION

**about**
**1 in 13**
**affected**
equivalent to roughly two kids in every classroom[6]

**6%**
**of UK adults**
or 2.4 million people are diagnosed with a food allergy[7]

### Keep Your Allergen Info Accurate:

Regularly review your ingredients and update allergen information to reflect any changes. Using allergen matrices or recipe cards is a great way to track allergens in every dish, including hidden ingredients like sauces or garnishes.

### Prevent Cross-Contamination:

Separate storage and preparation areas for allergenic ingredients are essential. Clearly label containers and utensils and implement strict hygiene measures such as frequent handwashing and using disposable cleaning cloths.

## STAFF TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION

### Training:

All staff should be trained to handle allergen-related inquiries and procedures. Make sure they know the risks of providing incorrect information and ensure ongoing training through refresher courses. Keep training records and ensure that all staff can confidently manage allergen requests.

### Communication:

Establish clear communication protocols between kitchen and front-of-house staff. All guests should be asked about allergies at the point of order, and any uncertainty should always be addressed before serving.



[6] www.food.gov.uk [7] www.food.gov.uk

## ALLERGEN ACTION PLAN: WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Every catering business should have an allergen action plan in place to handle allergic reactions. This plan should include steps such as:

- **Staying with the affected person**
- **Administering an antihistamine or EpiPen if required**
- **Calling emergency services immediately**

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ALLERGEN MANAGEMENT IN YOUR KITCHEN

1. **Label Everything Clearly:** All ingredients and dishes should be clearly labelled, especially those containing allergens. Always record the allergen information when transferring ingredients into storage containers.
2. **Create Allergen-Free Zones:** Dedicate specific areas of the kitchen for allergen-free dishes. Use separate utensils and equipment and consider colour-coded containers to minimize cross-contamination risks.
3. **Menu Development:** Clearly mark dishes containing common allergens on your menu. Consider offering “free-from” alternatives where possible and develop protocols to handle substitutions safely.
4. **Regular Audits and Reviews:** Work closely with suppliers to verify the allergen status of ingredients and conduct regular internal audits. Record these checks to ensure compliance with regulations.

## SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES

**When catering for customers with allergies:**

1. **Have Clear Procedures:** Ensure that all staff know how to handle allergen requests. If there is any uncertainty, be transparent with customers so they can make informed decisions.
2. **Prioritise Safety:** Always prioritise safety over assumptions. If a dish can’t be guaranteed allergen-free, communicate this clearly to the customer.

## CHANGING THE FUTURE OF ALLERGENS

The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation is dedicated to making allergies a concern of the past, beginning with food allergies, to ensure a safer world for all. Their mission drives impactful change through focused research, policy development, education, and raising critical allergy awareness to meet the needs of those affected.

With the support of fundraising, the Foundation collaborates with leading scientific experts to uncover the causes of allergies, aiming for prevention and, ultimately, eradication. Their unwavering commitment to funding pioneering research, with all findings openly shared for widespread benefit, brings meaningful progress toward a future free from allergic diseases.

Find out more about the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation and how you can help change the future of allergens here

Natasha Allergy Research Foundation

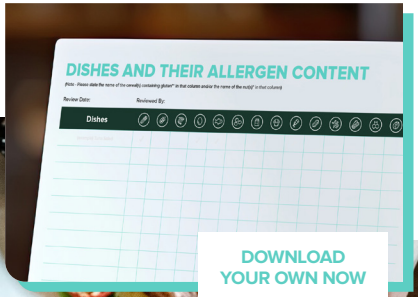
## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND CARE HOMES

In educational and care settings, managing food allergens requires additional attention:

- **Schools:** Schools should collaborate with caterers to ensure safe meal options for pupils with allergies. Parents play a key role in providing allergy information, while schools must share this with caterers. Caterers should train their staff and develop clear procedures to avoid allergen exposure.
- **Care Homes:** Care home caterers should follow similar practices, with extra attention to residents who may struggle to communicate their needs, such as those with dementia. Use visual indicators like coloured crockery to discreetly mark allergen-free meals and maintain open communication with care staff.

# 5 Effective ways to display allergens

1. **Menu Labels or Icons:** Restaurants can use symbols or icons (e.g., nuts, dairy, gluten, etc.) next to each dish on the menu to indicate the presence of common allergens. This is a clear and simple way for customers to identify potential allergens.
2. **Allergen Guide/Chart:** Provide a separate allergen guide or chart that lists all the menu items alongside the allergens they contain. This can be a physical chart handed to customers or displayed at the counter.
3. **Digital Menus or QR Codes:** Using digital menus, either on a website or via QR codes, allows customers to easily access detailed allergen information. This can be especially useful if the menu changes frequently, as digital formats are easier to update.
4. **Table Tents or Signage:** Restaurants can place table tents or signs that inform customers to ask staff about allergens, or include a list of common allergens found in their dishes. This reminds customers of the potential risk and encourages inquiries.
5. **Verbal Communication by Staff:** Train staff to ask diners about food allergies and be knowledgeable about allergens in each dish. Staff can provide detailed allergen information when taking orders, ensuring that customers with allergies feel safe and informed.

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