

Scottish Borders Council's guide to food allergens for restaurants and takeaways

Food information law: food allergies

Food allergies can be life threatening and the only way people can deal with a food allergy is to avoid the foods that make them ill. An oversight by a food business – such as serving someone food to which they are allergic – can damage the reputation of the business, as well as cause serious harm to the customer.

14 substances or products which may cause food allergies or intolerances are identified in law. These 14 food allergens can be found by clicking on the link below.

https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/FSS_Allergy_Poster.pdf

Providing allergen information for loose foods

You can identify if a food product contains allergenic ingredients by reviewing the product label. Allergens are emphasised within the ingredients list so they clearly stand out.

If you are asked about the allergenic ingredients contained in a meal you or your staff have prepared, you or the staff are required by law to tell customers which of the 14 allergens it contains. The law allows allergen information to be provided to customers in writing, for example by including allergen information to a menu or an allergen matrix, or verbally, so you may tell your customers face to face. Allergen information can also be included in recipes or explanations of the dishes provided. You need to consider the impact when recipes changes. Allergy information must accurate and kept up to date.

More information can be found by clicking on links below.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/loosefoodsleaflet.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-chart.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-signage.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/recipe-sheet.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/thinkallergy.pdf>

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/business-and-industry/safety-and-regulation/menuca>

Think allergy posters in various other languages

Bengali

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Think%20Allergy%20Poster%20Bengali.pdf>

Chinese

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Think%20Allergy%20Poster%20Chinese.pdf>

Punjabi

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Think%20Allergy%20Poster%20Punjabi.pdf>

Urdu

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Think%20Allergy%20Poster%20Urdu.pdf>

Cooking for people with allergies

Even a tiny trace of an allergen can be enough to cause an allergic reaction and as food allergens cannot be removed by cooking it is important that they are managed carefully.

It is essential to practice good kitchen hygiene, as well as careful separation, storage and labelling of ingredients when preparing food.

When you prepare food for someone with a food allergy you should:

- Ask your customer what they can and cannot eat
- Before you start preparing the food, clean all work surfaces and equipment thoroughly using hot, soapy water to remove traces of anything you might have cooked before.
- Keep allergens and ingredients containing allergens separate from other foods and follow the advice below for avoiding cross-contamination in the kitchen.
- Double check ingredients listed on pre-packed foods e.g. sauces for allergens.
- Keep a note of the ingredients used in your dish so you can answer any questions your customer may have about the food.

Controlling cross-contamination of allergies

There are several things you can do to prevent cross-contamination of allergens. These include:

- having separate work surfaces, chopping boards and utensils for foods prepared free from one or several allergens
- cleaning utensils before each usage, especially if they were used to prepare meals containing allergens
- storing ingredients and prepared foods separately in closed and labelled containers
- keeping ingredients that contain allergens separate from other ingredients
- washing hands thoroughly between preparing dishes with and without certain allergens

Allergen cross-contamination can happen through using the same cooking oil. For example, to cook gluten-free chips, you can't use the same oil which has been previously used for cooking your battered fish.

If you can't avoid cross-contamination, you should tell your customers that you can't provide an allergen-free dish.

Free-from claims, including gluten-free

Making 'free from claims' for meals requires strict controls of ingredients, how they are handled and prepared. This is because a free-from claim is a guarantee that the food is suitable for all with an allergy or intolerance. For instance, if you are handling wheat flour in kitchen and you cannot remove the risk of cross-contamination through segregation by time and/or space, you should let the customer know and you should not make any gluten-free or wheat-free claims.

Managing food safety and keeping records

If you use CookSafe, make sure that you take another look at the Allergen Management house rules and make sure that you have completed the Allergen Identification Table as well as the Allergen Management House Rules.

If you use an alternative documented food safety management system then you must cover food allergies including the provision of allergen information and the risks of cross contamination when handling allergenic ingredients and the controls you have in place to prevent it.

Distance selling via a website or telephone or third party websites

If customers order foodstuffs over the phone, through your website or via a third party website where the foods will be delivered to the customer, allergen information must be available to the customer before the purchase is concluded, and the allergy information must be provided at two stages in the process. It means providing it:

- before the purchase of the food is completed - this could be in writing (for example on a website, catalogue or menu) or orally (for example by phone)
- when the food is delivered - this could be in writing (for example on allergen stickers on food or enclosed hard copy of menu) or orally (for example by phone)

The allergen information should be available to a customer in a written form at some point between a customer placing the order and taking delivery of it. If your business provides foods through distant selling, you should include this information in your documented food safety management system.

Allergy training

If you would like to learn more about food allergen labelling, The Food Standards Scotland [online allergen training](#) package deals with the requirements regarding the provision of allergen information.

Future changes to the legislation

From October 2021, the way food businesses must provide allergen labelling information for packaged foodstuffs made on site and sold directly from the premises will change. Foods will need to have a label with full ingredients list with allergenic ingredients emphasised within it. These changes will provide essential information to help people with a food allergy / intolerance to make safe choices when buying packaged food that is made at your food business. The name of the food must also appear on the product.

Further guidance about allergies and intolerances can be found by clicking on the link below.

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/food-allergies>