Text, logo

Description automatically generated**Allergens**

In the UK about ten people die every year from an allergic reaction to food, and many more end up in hospital.  In most cases, the food that causes the reaction is from a restaurant or takeaway.

There is a list of 14 specific food allergens, the presence of which must always be brought to the attention of the consumer.  Failure to do so is a criminal offence and, in the most extreme cases, could cause someone to die.

You must declare if any of the following 14 allergens are present in the food:

* cereals containing gluten, such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, kamut and their hybridised strains
* peanuts (also called groundnuts)
* nuts, such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios, macadamias and Queensland nuts
* fish
* crustaceans (includes crabs, lobsters, shrimps and prawns)
* molluscs (includes mussels, cockles, oysters, scallops, squid and octopus)
* sesame seeds
* eggs
* milk and milk products (including lactose)
* soy beans
* Text, logo

  Description automatically generatedcelery
* lupin
* mustard
* sulphur dioxide and sulphites at levels above 10 mg per kg or 10 mg per litre expressed as SO2

This requirement relates not only to the ingredients (and their components) that are used in the product but to anything that is still present in the final product, even in an altered form. This includes:

* additives present in the ingredients that are carried over into the final product - for example, sulphur dioxide, which is used as a preservative
* processing aids used to assist in the manufacturing process - for example, frying with peanut oil or using it to line trays and moulds
* solvents and media for additives or flavourings - for example, the liquids used to produce a suspension
* any other substances

**Caterers, restaurants, food stalls / vans, etc.**

You must make allergen information available to your customers, either by giving them full allergen information or by making it clear how they can get the information (signposting).

Text, logo

Description automatically generatedAllergen information can be provided in writing on menus, chalkboards, notices, etc by simply listing the allergens present in the food. Alternatively, a single allergen notice specifying the allergens present in every dish is permitted, provided that it is visible to the customer prior to ordering.

If customers must place their order at a single point (by queuing at the counter, for example) the information only needs to be visible from that point; however, if customers can order from multiple points (bar, table, etc) then the information should be presented at each point (on the menu, for example).

The most reliable way of providing the allergen information is in writing; this should be considered best practice.

**Signposting: on the premises**

'Signposting' is an instruction to the customer explaining how they can get the information. You can place a notice on display that instructs customers to speak to a member of staff if they require allergen information (to be provided verbally) - for example, 'Allergies and intolerance: please speak to a member of staff if you require information about our ingredients'.

The notice should be visible to customers where they place their order and, as above, if they can place their order from multiple locations the signposting should be displayed at each one.

Text, logo

Description automatically generated

If a customer asks about allergens you must give them complete and accurate information; this is best achieved using an allergens file.

An allergens file contains a breakdown of all the allergens that are present in every food item that you sell. You will need to check all the ingredients that are used in each item of food and list the allergens. Also check ingredient packaging / specifications as it will not always be obvious from the name of the ingredient that it contains allergens (for example, soy sauce contains wheat, Worcestershire sauce contains fish, etc) and remember to account for anything such as peanut oil used in preparing the food.

The file should always be kept in the same place and all staff should be trained on how to use it. If asked about allergens, staff should never answer from memory or guess, they should check the file every time. Allow the customer to see the relevant page in the file if they would like to do so and let them make the decision as to whether it is safe for them to eat the food.

If a member of staff does not have access to allergen information and is asked whether it is safe for an allergen sufferer to eat a dish, the answer must always be no; they should always tell the customer that their safety cannot be guaranteed if they were to eat the dish.

If a recipe changes you will have to check the new ingredients and make any necessary changes to the file as soon as the change is made; any delay means that customers are being given incorrect information, which may result in them becoming ill or even dying.

Text, logo

Description automatically generated

**Allergen-free requests**

You must provide accurate allergen information but you have no legal obligation to provide allergen-free food.

If a customer requests that a dish be made without allergens you can say no. If you agree to produce the meal you have to ensure that the meal is free of the allergenic ingredient AND ensure that the food is not contaminated with the allergen in question. This means that knives, ladles, bowls, chopping blocks, work surfaces, staff clothing, hands, etc all have to be thoroughly cleaned so that they cannot transfer traces of the allergen to the food.

If powdered allergenic ingredients are being used it may not be possible to prevent contamination as traces of the allergen can become suspended in the air and settle on food, clothing, utensils, etc.

If you are not completely confident that you can produce an allergen-free meal, you should refuse the request. If your customer were to suffer an allergic reaction after eating a meal you claimed was free of the allergen in question, you will be liable for criminal offences and potential civil action and, in the most extreme cases, the customer could die.

**Preventing contamination**

Text, logo

Description automatically generatedThere are certain practical steps you can take to avoid accidental contamination with allergens, which include:

* having separate kitchen areas, chopping blocks, utensils, pans, etc for the preparation of foods containing allergens
* thoroughly washing chopping blocks, utensils, pans, etc after they have been used to prepare meals containing allergens
* storing ingredients and prepared foods separately in closed containers
* keeping ingredients that contain allergens separate from other ingredients

While these precautions are relatively simple it can often be impractical to follow them, especially for small businesses where space, time and resources are limited. Where this is the case it is permissible to use a precautionary allergen statement.

**Precautionary allergen statements**

If, due to the nature of the business and the food that is being prepared, it is not possible to guarantee that there will be no allergen cross-contamination, you may place a notice on display to this effect - for example, 'Allergen advice: due to the way our food is prepared it is not possible to guarantee the absence of allergens in our products'.

The precautionary statement must be used in addition to the allergen information covered above and does not replace the duty to inform consumers about the presence of allergens.

The statement should be displayed at each place the consumer can place their order, in the same way as the allergen information.

Text, logo

Description automatically generated

**Allergen information: non-prepacked (loose)**

This section relates to food that is:

* sold loose (no packaging at all)
* packaged at the request of the consumer (sold loose but placed in some form of packaging after being purchased)

You must inform the customer of any allergens that are present in the food and there are various ways you can do this:

* a notice in close proximity to the goods - for example, prominently displayed on the cabinet in which the goods are displayed
* a shelf edge label
* a label attached to the product

The information should be presented in the form 'Contains:' followed by a list of the allergens present in the food.

If the specific allergen appears in the list above then you should list it by name - for example, 'Contains: Wheat, Milk, Eggs'.

If the name of the allergen does not appear in the list above (prawns, for example) you must specify the category of allergen - for example, 'Contains: Crustaceans'.

This is not necessary if the name of the product makes a clear reference to the allergen (milk, peanut butter, etc).

Text, logo

Description automatically generated

Many businesses selling non-prepacked foods will have difficulties (similar to those experienced by restaurants, cafes, etc) preventing cross contamination with other allergens. Where this is the case you may use a precautionary statement in the same way as above. The statement should be prominently displayed at the point that the products are made available to the customer.

Allergen information may instead be given by verbal signposting.

**Allergen information: prepacked**

Prepacked means food that is either wholly or partially enclosed in packaging and cannot be removed from the packaging without changing it in some way.

Prepacked food must have an ingredients list that lists all the ingredients in the product. Ingredients that are themselves made up of more than one ingredient (referred to as compound ingredients) and make up more than 2% of the finished product must be broken down into their components in the ingredients list.

Allergenic ingredients must be emphasised in some way every time they appear in the ingredients list. This is usually achieved through the use of bold text, capital letters or colour; you should choose whichever method you prefer. An example using bold text would be: 'Ingredients: Water, Mustard Flour (21%), Sugar, Salt, Wheat Flour, Turmeric, Acid (Citric Acid).'

Text, logo

Description automatically generatedIf the same allergen appears in the ingredients list multiple times it must be emphasised each time it appears.

If the name of the allergen appears in the ingredients list then you only need to emphasise the allergenic part of the ingredient - for example: 'Ingredients: Peanut Butter (Roasted Peanuts, Rapeseed Oil, Sugar, Palm Oil, Salt)'.

If the allergen does not appear in the name of the ingredient you must specify the category of allergen in brackets immediately after the ingredient appears in the ingredients list; the category of allergen should be emphasised. To use a beef and ale pie as an example, the list should state 'Ingredients: Beef (35%), Beer **(Barley)'.**

There is an exception to this. Cheese, butter, cream and milk are understood by the public to be a clear reference to milk; as such, the words cheese, butter, etc need to be emphasised but there is no need to add the category of allergen (milk) in brackets - for example, 'Ingredients: **Cheese'.**

Where a named variety is specified (Wensleydale, Mozzarella, etc) you will need to add the category of allergen - for example, 'Ingredients: Mozzarella **(Milk)'.**

Text, logo

Description automatically generated**Allergen information: Prepacked for Direct Sale**

Prepacked for direct sale or PPDS is food which is packaged at the same place it is offered or sold to consumers and is in this packaging before it is ordered or selected.

It can include food that consumers select themselves (e.g. from a display unit), as well as products kept behind a counter and some food sold at mobile or temporary outlets.

Prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food can include the following:

* Sandwiches and bakery products which are packed on site before a consumer selects or orders them
* Fast food packed before it is ordered, such as a burger under a hot lamp where the food cannot be altered without opening the packaging
* Products which are prepackaged on site ready for sale, such as pizzas, rotisserie chicken, salads and pasta pots
* Burgers and sausages prepackaged by a butcher on the premises ready for sale to consumers
* Samples of cookies given to consumers for free which were packed on site
* Foods packaged and then sold elsewhere by the same operator at a market stall or mobile site

The label for PPDS food will need to show:

* the name of the food
* an ingredients list
* any of the [14 allergens](https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-allergy-and-intolerance) emphasised in the ingredients list, if these are present in the food.

These criteria need to be displayed in line with the legal requirements that apply to naming the food and listing ingredients, as per food law.

The allergenic ingredients within the food must be emphasized every time they appear in the ingredients list.

For further information and resources for allergen information can be found on the Food Standards Agency website, including a training module aimed at businesses. <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>Text, logo

Description automatically generated