

# Allergens

Allergen control is a vital in food production to protect those who may be allergic from potentially life threatening harm. Allergen control should be ingrained in staff and volunteer training and production activities to ensure you are producing and serving a safe product. The following is a brief overview and does not contain all of the information you will need to control allergens in your production. Further reading and guidance can be found through the links below.

## Allergens

The Food Information for Consumers and the Food Standards Agency identify 14 allergens that are found in foods and are required to be labelled where present. **The 14 allergens are:**

1. Celery
2. Cereals containing gluten (such as barley, wheat and oats)
3. Crustaceans (such as prawns, crabs and lobsters)
4. Eggs
5. Fish
6. Lupin
7. Milk
8. Molluscs (such as mussels and oysters)
9. Mustard
10. Peanuts
11. Sesame
12. Soybeans
13. Sulphur dioxide and sulphites (if at a concentration of more than ten parts per million)
14. Tree nuts (such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts).

## Information to consumers

There have been a number of recent changes in the allergen labelling regulations and you need to ensure you keep up to date with any changes. Allergen information should be readily available to your customers to include any of the 14 allergens that are added as part of the recipe and also possible allergen traces, in the form of 'May contain traces of ....'.

One of the recent changes relates to 'Natasha's Law' and has meant that pre-packed products for direct sale to the consumer (such as sandwiches and bakery products which are packed on site before a consumer selects or orders them or 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) are also required to have a label with the name of the food and the ingredients list with the 14 allergens emphasised within it. For food that is pre-packed, allergens should be easy to find on a label and accompanied by a full ingredients list.

### An example of how to list allergens on your product

Ingredients: Water, Carrots, Onions, Red Lentils (4.5%) Potatoes, Cauliflower, Leeks, Peas, Cornflour, **Wheat flour**, Salt, **Cream**, Yeast Extract, Concentrated Tomato Paste, Garlic, Whey (**Milk**), Sugar, **Celery** Seed, Sunflower Oil, Herbs and Spice, White Pepper, Parsley.

Allergen Advice: for allergens, see ingredients in **bold**

On occasions and when bold typing is unclear, highlighting using UPPER CASE text may be used as an alternative to emboldened text. For food that is given away or sold at the point of serving, for instance in a cafe or restaurant you should still provide allergen information, and it is useful to have signage available that requests that customers ask for allergen information at the point of ordering, or list in a menu, or hold a folder with all ingredient and allergen information. A folder available to all staff can also be a point of reference for all ingredient and allergen information to be available and be sure to update and check on this information regularly in case of recipe or ingredient changes that may affect your allergen information.



# Allergens

## Allergen traces

In deciding what allergen labelling is needed, in addition to those allergens deliberately added, businesses must also risk assess the need to include precautionary warning in the form of 'May contain traces of...'. Normally, traces could arise from those found within raw materials that may be listed in ingredient specifications, or cross-over during preparation. The first priority will be to avoid the need for trace labelling, but if there is a foreseeable risk of cross-over, precautionary labelling may be needed.

## 'Free-from' products

Where products are labelled as 'free from' or include a named allergen, such as 'gluten-free', careful consideration is needed to ensure that robust controls are in place. There is also an expectation from the authorities that there is a rolling programme of testing to validate such claims. This will involve testing of products to confirm absence of the stated allergen, on an occasional basis.

## Training

All staff and as good practice volunteers should complete allergen training.

Free allergen training is available on the food.gov.uk website at [www.allergytraining.food.gov.uk](http://www.allergytraining.food.gov.uk)

## Changes since Brexit

Many regulations around allergens and food law are linked to European legislation. The FSA are currently updating the UK's food legislation as a result of Britain leaving Europe and this may affect allergen and wider food law. Check back regularly on the food.gov and the FSA for updates.

## Links & further reading

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses#allergens>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergy-training-for-food-businesses>

## Managing & handling allergens in the production space

### Layout of kitchen

When choosing a production space to rent, or designing your own production space, it is important to consider if your production flow around the space will enable you to manage allergens effectively. For example, this may include having a dedicated prep space where you use wheat ingredients, or being able to have a separate storage space for ingredients containing allergens. Many businesses also fully segregate peanuts, tree nuts and sesame.

### Cleaning processes

Cleaning processes should be linked to allergen control and their effective management. If renting a premises, this may include doing a full clean before production, as you may not know how the space was used previously and whether it was cleaned effectively to eliminate any allergens or sources of cross-contamination.

Your cleaning and sanitation processes should be robust, regular and consistent in how they are carried out to remove any traces of allergen products.

Cleaning cloths can be a source of cross-contamination of allergens - use disposable cloths where possible. Some larger businesses also use specialised allergen swabs that detect traces of a particular allergen to demonstrate effective removal following cleaning.



# Managing & handling allergens in the production space

## Staff training

Staff should be trained in allergen awareness and in your cleaning processes and especially the order of cleaning process, which cleaning products to use and which cloths or paper towels to use. There are many allergen posters and resources to download for free and these should be available to view for staff and volunteers.

Staff should be trained in effective hand washing between tasks or using allergenic ingredients. Staff and volunteers should also be told the importance of not guessing whether a product contains allergens and know where or how to find definitive information.

## Suppliers

Ensure that any ingredients you use have a full ingredients list to determine whether they contain allergens e.g. a powdered soup stock. Request specifications and further information on possible traces for other allergens if you are unsure.

## Ingredient storage

If you transfer or store any ingredients out of their original packaging, e.g. flour being transplanted from paper bag into a plastic tub then the container should be labelled clearly as containing that ingredient with a reminder that it is an allergenic ingredient. That container should be dedicated to that ingredient and not changed to hold other ingredients to avoid cross-contamination. You may also want to have a dedicated shelf, storage box, or cupboard to store these ingredients away from others that do not contain allergens. Dedicated, allergen labels (often coloured purple) are used in many businesses to highlight allergen presence to staff.

## Production order

If you are preparing multiple products on a production run, for instance, a main course and a pudding for a community lunch, you may want to consider the order of preparation so that you are preparing any foods without allergenic ingredients first, before any allergen containing foods have entered the production space, or have been opened. Ensure a complete clean down is carried out in between preparing different products.

## Different equipment & utensils

Where possible use separate pots, pans, chopping boards, knives and spoons and separate preparation areas for allergen and allergen free foods. If not possible, thoroughly clean equipment/ utensils/ surfaces between uses (dishwashers are often more effective than hand-washing) Having dedicated or colour coded utensils and equipment is also a way to control allergens in the kitchen.

## Labelling

If you are adding a label to any outside packaging, Check your labels and check again! Many businesses have a number of different people to double-check for errors. Ask yourself if it is the right label for the right product and if the label is still current and up to date to show any allergens, or changes in recipes.

## Links

<https://diversey.com/en/blog/effective-allergen-management-and-control-food-manufacturing>  
<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/906815/guidance-control-of-allergens-in-the-kitchen.pdf>

