

Producing and sharing allergen information

A guide for early years settings in England.

Introduction

New allergen labelling requirements were introduced in December 2014. This guide outlines the changes and provides information to help you meet them.

The new requirements

The new laws require food businesses including restaurants, cafes, hospitals, early years settings and schools providing non-prepacked food to provide information about the allergens present as ingredients in the food they serve. These requirements are included in EU and UK laws^{1,2} and apply across Europe.

Why is it important to provide allergen information?

In the UK, it is estimated that around 2 million people (1-2% of adults and 5-8% of children) have a food allergy.³ This is when the body's immune system reacts unusually to a specific food, because it mistakenly perceives it as a threat, and a reaction can be produced by just a tiny amount of a food.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction to food can include:

- Itching in the mouth, throat and/or ears, a raised itchy red rash (hives)
- Swelling of the face, around the eyes, lips, tongue and roof of the mouth and vomiting
- In the most serious cases, a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis, which can include breathing difficulties, light headedness and feeling like you are going to faint) can be life-threatening. This reaction is less common than those above.

There is no known cure for food allergies. People with allergies need to avoid the foods to which they are allergic. To do this, they need accurate ingredients information about the allergens that are present in food and drinks – whether prepacked, or provided by an early years setting or other food business.

Early years settings are required to obtain information about children's special dietary requirements – including food allergies and intolerances – before they attend, and record and act on the information provided about children's dietary needs.⁴

It is important that requests for special diets are handled sensitively and appropriately, and this can be included as part of a policy, describing how these are managed, and a procedure to follow. Understanding which allergens are present in each of the meals and snacks you provide is an important step in providing food and drink which is safe for children with food allergies and intolerances.



¹ EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 1169/2011: <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:304:0018:0063:EN:PDF>

² The Food Information Regulations 2014: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/1855/contents/made

³ Food Standards Agency (2015). Food allergen labelling and information requirements under the EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation No. 1169/2011: Technical guidance: www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/food-allergen-labelling-technical-guidance.pdf

⁴ Department for Education (2014). Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five: www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2

The main 14 food allergens

Food businesses need to be able to explain to their customers which of the main 14 allergens are included as an ingredient in the foods they provide. These allergens are the ones which people across Europe are most commonly allergic or intolerant to. The table below lists the allergens which need to be declared, and examples of foods in which they are commonly found.

Celery		<p>This includes celery stalks, leaves and seeds and celeriac.</p> <p>Celery is often found in celery salt, soups and stock cubes.</p>
Cereals containing gluten: wheat, rye, barley & oats		<p>These are often found in flour, bread, cakes and biscuits, pasta, couscous and breakfast cereals, pastry, sauces, breaded or battered products, batters, soups and stock cubes.</p> <p>You should declare the individual cereal (e.g. wheat), and can choose whether to also mention gluten.</p>
Crustaceans		<p>These include prawns, crab, lobster, crayfish and scampi.</p>
Egg		<p>These include eggs from chickens, ducks and other birds.</p> <p>Egg is often found in cakes, desserts, mayonnaise, meat products, some pasta, battered and crumbed products, ice cream and sauces as well as egg dishes such as quiche and omelette.</p>
Fish		<p>This includes all white and oily fish e.g. cod, plaice, Pollock, salmon, pilchards, sardines and tuna.</p> <p>This is often found in fish sauces, relishes and Worcestershire sauce.</p>
Lupin		<p>This includes lupin seeds and flour and can be found in types of bread, pastries and pasta.</p>
Milk		<p>This includes milk from cows, sheep, goats and other mammals, milk proteins (casein and whey) and milk products (including lactose).</p> <p>Found in cream, butter, yoghurt and fromage frais, fat spreads, crème fraiche, ice cream, soups, sauces and stock cubes.</p>
Molluscs		<p>These include oyster, octopus, squid, cockles, mussels, winkles, scallops and snails. They can also be found in fish sauce.</p>
Mustard		<p>This includes mustard seeds, powder and liquid mustard of all types.</p> <p>It is often found in marinades, dressings, sauces, soups and meat products.</p>
Nuts		<p>This includes almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecan nuts, Brazil nuts, pistachio, cashew and macadamia (Queensland) nuts.</p> <p>These can be found in nut butters, biscuits and desserts, marzipan, nut oils and sauces.</p> <p>You should declare the individual nut (e.g. almond).</p>
Peanuts		<p>These can be found in biscuits, cakes, sauces and in peanut oil.</p>
Sesame		<p>This can be found in sesame seeds, powder, oil, tahini, houmous, breadsticks and bread.</p>
Soybeans		<p>This includes soya included within soy sauce, textured vegetable protein and soya mince, soya flour, tofu, soya milk, tofu, and some bread products.</p>
Sulphur dioxide or sulphites		<p>This is often used as a preservative in dried fruit, meat products, soft drinks and canned beans.</p>

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Compiling, displaying and communicating allergen information

1 Make sure you have up to date and accurate written information about the food you provide e.g.

- A menu which lists the food and drink provided at each meal and snack across the day
- A full set of recipes listing all ingredients.

2 Check each ingredient you use to see whether each one contains any of the 14 allergens listed on page 2.

You can find this information:

- On the product packaging of most prepacked products. Since December 2014, prepacked foods have been required to emphasise the presence of allergens in the ingredients list e.g. using **bold text**⁵
- Listed on product specifications provided by suppliers
- By contacting your suppliers and requesting allergen information.

Keep ingredients information for bought in products so you can refer back to them if needed.

3 Use your recipes and the allergen information for the ingredients you use to list the allergens included in each recipe. You can record this information on the recipes, or in a separate document (e.g. a table displaying which allergens are in which recipes).

4 Decide how to provide allergen information for the food you provide. This needs to be easily accessible, so that staff, parents and carers know where to access the information if required:

- You can include written allergen information on a menu, chalkboard, website or information pack/folder
- If the information isn't provided upfront, you will need to signpost where it can be obtained from (as written or verbal information)
- If the information is provided verbally by staff, there must be a process in place to ensure the information given is correct, consistent and verifiable.

5 Make sure that the food you provide reflects the written allergen information, by:

- Checking that the ingredients delivered are as ordered, and where alternative products are delivered, that the allergen information is checked and updated where necessary, and conveyed to staff
- Ensuring that staff preparing meals and snacks follow the standard recipes using the ingredients stated
- Having a process in place to update allergen information where recipes or products are changed, or ingredients are reformulated.

6 Make sure everyone preparing and serving food has received appropriate training to ensure they understand where to access allergen information for the menu, and can provide (or know where to access) accurate information for parents/carers on request.

7 Make sure suitable measures are taken to prevent allergen cross-contamination during storage, preparation and service of food, and where food is used in activities, by:

- Storing ingredients in the original containers where possible, and clearly labelling any ingredients which are transferred into different containers
- Removing or reducing potential cross-contamination which may arise from shared equipment (e.g. serving spoons, chopping boards and woks)
- Thoroughly cleaning work surfaces, equipment and surfaces that food has touched
- Thorough hand-washing before and after preparing food.



⁵ Remember that some products have a long shelf life, so some products may have been packed before December 2014, and so may include allergy information in the old format.

Eat better, start better

Further advice and resources

Guidance on managing special dietary requirements is included in Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England – A Practical Guide
www.actionforchildren.org.uk/eatbetterstartbetter

Further guidance on catering for special dietary requirements is included in Catering for special dietary requirements: A guide for early years settings in England
www.actionforchildren.org.uk/eatbetterstartbetter

Further information about food allergies is available on the NHS Choices website:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-allergy/Pages/Intro1.aspx

Information is available for how to comply with food safety and hygiene regulations from the Food Standards Agency Safer Food Better Business website
www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/sfbb

Resources to support food businesses to provide allergen information, and to teach children about food allergies, are available from the Food Standards Agency website
www.food.gov.uk/allergen-resources

Online training on food allergies is available on the Food Standards Agency website
<http://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/>

Anaphylaxis Campaign advice on catering for allergies is available from
www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/food-industry/catering-for-allergy---practical-measures

Allergy UK food allergy information is available from
www.allergyuk.org/food-allergy-menu/food-allergy

If you have specific queries on the requirements of the Food Information Regulations, you can contact your local enforcement agency, which is usually the Trading Standards/Environmental Health department of the Local Authority.

HOW

**ACTION FOR
CHILDREN**

WORKS

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