

**Food Safety Guidance**

**Food allergies in non-pre-packed foods**

Food businesses must provide information to their customers about the allergens in their food.

A food allergy is not the same as food intolerance. Food intolerance is an abnormal response to a food, but it doesn’t involve the immune system in the same way as a food allergy. Food allergies pose a greater and much more acute health risk as there is an abnormal response to a food triggered by the body's immune system.

Allergic reactions to food can cause serious illness, and every year customers die because they have consumed food with a food allergen which wasn’t declared.

There is currently a list of 14 foods which can cause allergic reactions that must be declared. These are:

* celery
* cereals that contain gluten – including wheat (such as spelt and Khorasan, rye, barley and oats)
* crustaceans – such as prawns, crabs and lobsters
* eggs
* fish
* lupin
* milk
* molluscs – such as mussels and oysters
* mustard
* tree nuts – including almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts
* peanuts
* sesame seeds
* soybeans
* sulphur dioxide and sulphites (if they are at a concentration of more than ten parts per million)

Some customers may be allergic to other foods, for example lentils, kiwi fruit and strawberries. You must also take care if the customer is allergic to any food.

Recording allergen information and clear communication with your staff, customers and suppliers will help to ensure that customers with food allergies are given accurate information.

You will need to think about how:

* food allergens are handled
* information is given to the customer
* staff can be trained about allergens

**What should you do?**

Here is some information to help you when providing food, including drinks, for a customer with a food allergy or intolerance.

**Do your customers find it ‘easy to ask’ for allergen or dietary information?**

You should provide a [poster](https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-signage.pdf), or similar sign, asking the customer to advise you of any allergy, or preferably full details of allergens can be provided on a menu or at the point of display.

Consider asking your staff to check for food allergies when taking orders or reservations, not just relying on the customer advising of the allergy. The staff taking the allergy information from the customer must be aware of the importance of this information and ensure their response is accurate. If they are unsure, they must let the customer know and must NEVER guess.

**Do you provide allergy information for food deliveries?**

If food is sold online or by phone through distance selling, allergen information must be provided at two stages in the order process.

You must provide allergen information:

* before the purchase of the food is completed - this can be in writing (on a website, catalogue or menu) or orally (by phone) **AND**
* when the food is delivered - this can be in writing (allergen stickers on food or an enclosed copy of a menu) or orally (by phone)

Allergen information should be available to a customer in written form at a point between a customer placing the order and taking delivery of it.

Takeaway meals should be labelled clearly so customers know which dishes are suitable for those with an allergy.

**Do you have a process in place to ensure you can provide safe food for someone with an allergy or intolerance?**

This involves the whole process from purchase to providing the food to the customer. Good communication within the food business is essential.

You must have accurate recipes for each dish that you serve, so there is a clear list of allergens in your meals. It’s essential that this is kept up to date. Whenever you change ingredients you must check the allergens and, if necessary, update the allergen list. You must advise all staff of the changes. There are some example forms that you can use

* Recipe Template within the [Allergen section of CookSafe](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/CookSafe_-_Allergen_Management_Insert_Update_September_2021.pdf)
* Menu Chart/Allergen Matrix within the [Food Standards Agency website](https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-industry#resources)

You can use any other template you find works for your business.

You must make sure you accurately identify each allergen in a menu item or dish by carefully checking every ingredient. Remember cooking oil, sauces and garnishes.

Pre-packed foods must contain a list of ingredients with any of the 14 allergens listed above highlighted in some manner, for example in bold, different font or colour. This allows you to easily identify the allergens in the foods you prepare.

**Do you know what your critical control points are within your food operation to prevent allergen cross-contamination?**

Allergens can be transferred to a food due to cross–contamination during storage, preparation or service. You must have controls in place to prevent the inadvertent contamination of a food. If you can’t be sure you have effective measures in place, be honest and communicate this risk to your customers.

Ideally, separate equipment and utensils should be used for preparing allergenic foods. If this is not possible, you must ensure that the equipment and utensils are thoroughly cleaned before use. Food handlers must always wash their hands thoroughly before preparing a dish for an allergic person.

**Have you and your team received suitable allergen training to manage allergens appropriately within the business?**

It’s essential everyone working at the business is clear on what this process is.

Although allergies are covered during Food Hygiene Courses, more detailed, specific training courses are also available. [Free online allergy training](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/business-and-industry/safety-and-regulation/food-allergies-2/online-allergy-training) is available on the Food Standards Scotland website.

You must also train **all** your staff, not just the direct food handlers, in relation to the food allergens and controls within your business. Food allergies must be part of your Food Safety Management System (for example [Allergen Management House Rules](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/CookSafe_-_Allergen_Management_Insert_Update_September_2021.pdf) within the cross-contamination section of CookSafe). This must be communicated to staff at induction and at every review.

**Do you prepare foods and pack/wrap them on the premises?**

New legislation came into force in October 2021 for foods that are prepacked for direct sale. If foods are packed within your premises, before they are ordered by the customer, they must be labelled with the name of the food and a list of ingredients. Allergens must be highlighted within this list.

Further information about pre-packed for direct sale can be found at [Prepacked for direct sale allergen labelling | Food Standards Scotland | Food Standards Scotland](https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/business-and-industry/safety-and-regulation/food-allergies-2/prepacked-for-direct-sale)

If you require further information about food allergies please contact the Food & Safety team at [fs@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:fs@falkirk.gov.uk)