

Food Allergies

What food service workers need to know

Food allergies are sensitivities caused by a reaction of the body to specific proteins in food. These proteins are known as allergens. In allergic individuals the body mistakenly identifies the food as being harmful and releases chemicals that can cause a physical reaction.

Symptoms can appear immediately after the food is eaten or can show up some time later and include any of the following:

- Stomach: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and cramps.
- Breathing: Swelling of the throat, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, difficulty breathing a runny or stuffy nose.
- Heart: Weak pulse, feeling faint, dizzy or light-headed.
- Skin reactions: Flushed skin, eczema and hives.

In some cases a severe allergic reaction, known as anaphylaxis, may be fatal.

➤ Which foods cause allergic reactions?

Any food can cause an allergic reaction, however only a few foods are responsible for the majority of food allergies. The following foods and additives cause the most and severe allergic reactions and have been identified by Health Canada as the Ten Priority Allergens.

Ten Priority Allergens

- Eggs
- Milk
- Mustard
- Peanuts
- Seafood
- Wheat and other cereal grains containing gluten
- Soy
- Tree Nuts
- Sesame
- Sulphites

The Canadian government has strict labelling requirements for food allergens and the presence of any priority allergen must be declared on the food label. For more information on labelling requirements visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website.



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➤ **What is my responsibility?**

Food premises, such as restaurants, that do not package foods are not required by law to list food allergens.

➤ **What can I do to help?**

There is no cure for a food allergy. Strict avoidance of food allergens - and early recognition and management of allergic reactions to food are important measures to prevent serious health consequences. Therefore food service workers should know about allergies and how dangerous they can be.

Here are some things you can do to help people with allergies:

- Learn about allergies and the Ten Priority Allergens.
- Maintain a list of foods kept on the food premises and the ingredients in each menu item.
- Provide information on ingredients to your customers.
- If you are unsure of the ingredients in a menu item tell the customer you don't know.
- Avoid cross-contact. Cross-contact is the transfer of proteins from one food to another food. This can occur when one food is in direct contact with another or when one food comes in contact with a surface used to handle another food. To prevent cross-contact all surfaces that were used to handle foods, particularly one of the Ten Priority Allergens, should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.

**If a customer has a severe allergic reaction
Call 911**

Contact your local Environmental Health Officer for additional information.
For other food related information visit the Fraser Health
website at: www.fraserhealth.ca/foodsafety