

# PUBLICSECTOR CATERING

## GUIDE TO HANDLING ALLERGENS



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Nadim Ednan-Laperouse

## Welcome

### Understanding Allergens and Your Responsibility

Welcome to this comprehensive guide for public sector caterers in the UK on the handling of allergens. Being allergen aware as you prepare food for others is vital for keeping people living with food allergies safe. It has been produced for Public Sector Catering magazine, which is lucky to have been able to call on the expertise of The Russell Partnership and Hospitality Allergen Support UK (HASUK) for the content. Everyone should be able to enjoy food. However, if allergen precautions are not followed, it can have devastating consequences for people with food allergies and their families, as my wife Tanya and I sadly know only too well. In 2016, our daughter Natasha died aged 15 after having a severe food allergic reaction. She thought the sandwich she was eating didn't contain ingredients to which she was allergic and that it was therefore safe. However, in fact, ingredients she was allergic to were not listed on the label. Her death was entirely preventable - it should never have happened.

This guide aims to equip you with the knowledge and tools necessary to ensure the safety of individuals with food allergies.

As public sector caterers, you play a crucial role in providing safe and enjoyable dining experiences for everyone, including people with food allergies. So let's work together to create allergen-aware environments that prioritise the health and well-being of all patrons.

#### **Nadim Ednan-Laperouse, OBE,**

co-founder of The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, the UK's food allergy charity

#### The Russell Partnership

Russell Partnership Collection are the UK's leading Food, Hospitality, Nutrition and Technology Collection delivering creative and commercially viable solutions to over 600 clients across 30 countries and six continents. Russell Partnership Collection encompasses three companies that deliver international food and nutrition consulting, hospitality technology and large-scale wellbeing support. Professor David Russell, founded the business in November 1989 with a vision to create a positive difference across the Food and Hospitality sector. After three decades, that passion and vision remain intact with a global team of subject experts and thought leaders.

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# SECTION ONE

## HANDLING ALLERGENS

### Practices for Safe Food Handling



#### **Ingredient Awareness:**

All food businesses have a legal requirement to sell safe food and need to make customers aware of any food provided that contains or may contain any of the 14 listed food allergens. Understand the ingredients in your recipes and be vigilant about potential allergens present in them.

The 14 allergens required by food law to be declared include: Celery, Cereals containing gluten, Crustaceans, Eggs, Fish, Lupin, Milk, Molluscs, Mustard, Peanuts, Sesame, Soybeans, Sulphur dioxide & sulphites and Tree nuts.

Allergen labelling rules differ depending on how food is provided if it is prepacked or not.

#### **Preventative measures to avoid cross-contamination of allergens:**

- Prevent cross-contamination by using separate utensils and equipment for allergen-free preparation. Ensure that equipment and utensils are kept separate, and that staff are trained on which equipment will be used for specific ingredients.
- Clean utensils and equipment thoroughly before each use.
- Ensure kitchen surfaces are kept clean to avoid cross-contamination.
- Prepare allergen-containing foods separately where possible.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot water between preparing foods and dishes with and without allergens. If using gloves, ensure disposal of gloves between handling dishes with and without allergens.

#### **Storage Procedures:**

- Clearly label and store allergenic ingredients separately in sealed containers to avoid accidental cross-contact.
- Store open ingredient packages in sealed containers where appropriate.
- When ingredients are transferred from their original packaging, ensure allergens are checked for and labelled.
- Ensure appropriate spillage policies are in place to avoid cross-contamination.

#### **Communication within the Kitchen**

- Foster open communication among kitchen staff regarding allergen concerns to ensure a collective commitment to safety.
- Train staff to correctly use equipment, as well as measures to avoid cross-contamination and storage procedures.

# SECTION TWO

## SAFETY MEASURES

### Creating a secure environment



It is essential for food businesses to create a secure allergen environment. Having clear and professionally managed safety measures is paramount for keeping the handling of allergens safe, controlled, and well-communicated. Ensuring precise and clear allergen labelling, establishing emergency protocols, and conducting regular audits are some of the essential steps businesses must take to ensure a safe and secure environment.

#### Clear Allergen Labelling:

- Ensure all menus clearly highlight allergens present in each dish, using standardised symbols and clear language.
- Include a statement on menus to inform customers how to obtain allergen information for dishes.
- If cross-contamination is unavoidable, ensure that customers are informed that allergen-free dishes cannot be delivered utilising signage and verbal communication.

#### Emergency Protocols:

- Establish and communicate emergency response procedures in the event of an allergic reaction, including first aid measures and contacting medical professionals.
- Keep a recorded log of any incidents.

#### Regular Audits:

- Conduct regular audits of your processes and procedures to identify areas for improvement and maintain compliance with safety standards.



# SECTION THREE

## TRAINING INITIATIVES

### Powering Your Team



Including efficient and regular allergen training for your work teams ensures back-of-house and front-of-house teams have up-to-date knowledge of allergen procedures and an awareness of any important changes. Involving all staff of risks and procedures will both connect and empower team members.

#### **Comprehensive Training Programmes:**

- Train all staff, including front-of-house and back-of-house staff, from day one to ensure awareness of basic allergen control and procedures.
- Train staff in cross-contamination risks and ways to control them.
- Train all staff how to clean equipment and utensils to avoid cross-contamination.
- Implement regular training sessions for all staff members to enhance their understanding of allergens, including identification, handling, and communication.
- Ensure regular refresher courses.

#### **Documentation of Training:**

- Maintain staff training records to demonstrate commitment to compliance and ongoing professional development.

#### **Role-Specific Training:**

- Tailor training programmes to the specific roles within your catering team, ensuring everyone is equipped with the knowledge relevant to their responsibilities.



# SECTIONFOUR

## CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

### Building Trust through Communication



The foundation of customer trust and engagement is based on open and clear communication. Keeping an open dialogue and keeping all staff members up to date on allergen training, this promotes an environment where information around allergens can be communicated confidently, securely and openly.

#### Open Dialogue:

- Communicate your allergen policies by encouraging customers to communicate their allergen concerns and preferences, creating a positive and collaborative dining experience.

#### Allergen Information Platforms:

- Ensure major allergens are highlighted on menus, food displays and chalkboards etc.
- Utilise digital and print platforms to provide detailed allergen information, allowing customers to make informed choices.
- Provide guidance on who customers can talk to for further information.

#### Staff Engagement:

- Train all staff to communicate allergen information confidently and accurately, ensuring a seamless experience for customers with dietary restrictions.
- Appoint a suitable and responsible staff member to be the prime contact person for handling allergen-related food enquiries. Ensure other staff members know who this person is and ensure there is a second staff member responsible when the primary contact person is absent.



# SECTION FIVE

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Establishing a Culture of Allergen Awareness



For businesses to ensure good practice, it is essential to continuously improve and ensure open communication with staff, suppliers, and customers of any potential changes, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

#### Regular Staff Meetings:

- Conduct regular meetings to reinforce the importance of allergen safety and share updates on industry best practices.
- Ensure any procedure changes and updates are communicated.
- Maintain knowledge of ingredients and recipes and inform of any updates.
- Ensure suppliers are notified of any ingredient changes.

#### Continuous Improvement:

- Foster a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging feedback from both staff and customers, leading to ongoing enhancements in allergen management.

#### Recognition of Excellence:

- Acknowledge and reward staff members who consistently demonstrate exceptional allergen awareness and adherence to protocols.



# SECTION SIX

## NEAR-MISSES

A 'near miss' incident is an opportunity to review procedures



### In this special section allergen specialists **Jacqui McPeake and Caroline Benjamin** look at the importance of 'near-miss' reporting

A 'Near Miss' is described as an undesired event that under different circumstances could have resulted in harm, to people or damage to property, materials, or the environment. Research is showing that for every 90 near misses an accident will occur. The ultimate goal of near miss reporting is to address the incident and take action to prevent reoccurrence and remove the potential of an accident.

#### When it goes Wrong

The process of investigating a 'near miss' incident is an opportunity to review procedures and to change or add an additional step within the procedure which may reduce the risk of further incidents and potentially save lives. The slogan 'Don't Dismiss a Near Miss' reminds us to take this subject more seriously. Many food hypersensitive (FHS) customers say they do not receive an acknowledgement when informing a food business operation (FBO) of an allergy incident or near miss. They also report not knowing where or to whom to report an incident. All FBO's should incorporate 'near miss' incident reporting forms within their Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) & HACCP processes. All reports must be reviewed, investigated and, if required, procedures should be updated and communicated to all team members.

#### What do FBOs need to do?

We recommend a simple Word document be included within the FSMS paperwork similar to the food poisoning incident report document. The customer may report the incident immediately, or it may be a member of staff has spotted an incident which must be highlighted. The Manager/Supervisor should ask for a detailed statement about the incident and the report needs to be shared with senior managers and stakeholders within the organisation. After the incident has been investigated, procedures (HACCP) must be reviewed and if necessary updated to include any changes which have been introduced to prevent a reoccurrence of the issue. The customer will appreciate the communication and it will reassure them that their feedback was important.

#### HASUK

Hospitality Allergen Support UK (HASUK) is a joint venture between Caroline Benjamin Founder of Food Allergy Aware and Jacqui McPeake Founder of JACS Ltd. For more information contact:  
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#### No Blame Culture

It is important that a no blame culture is promoted. Staff should feel comfortable in reporting incidents which will highlight gaps and procedures without consequences for other staff or managers. It is also important the feedback is provided to the customer which will provide reassurance that the incident has been investigated and appropriate changes have been introduced. Food Safety should be of paramount importance. A positive food safety culture will encourage your teams to work together proactively to ensure that food served is safe for all customers with food allergies. A near miss is an opportunity to tighten procedures, to improve customer service, update staff knowledge, improve customer confidence and secure due diligence that your business is doing everything to keep the FHS customer safe and protect your staff.



Be safe... not sorry!

Don't Dismiss a

## Near Miss!

- 1 Realise It
- 2 Report It
- 3 Review It

Report it to management to conduct a root-cause analysis, improving food safety & allergen management across the UK.





# SECTION SEVEN

## CONCLUSION

### Commitment to Allergen Safety in Public Sector Catering



#### The right steps...

- All food businesses are legally required to sell food that is safe and ensure customers are aware if any of the 14 food allergens are present in the food served and sold.
- Food businesses must ensure a secure allergen environment where staff are trained to be able to clearly communicate with customers and where allergens are clearly labelled as well as highlighted on any menus, helping build trust around serving safe food.
- Professionally managing safety measures and ensuring the right steps are taken to prevent cross-contamination and safety risks is essential for any business handling food allergens.
- Establishing emergency protocols and conducting regular audits and including regular staff training as well as ensuring clear and open communication with any food suppliers, it helps food businesses operate in a way that is professional and safe.

**By following the guidelines outlined, you contribute to the safety and well-being of your customers, many of whom are among the most vulnerable members of society and create a dining environment that is safe and inclusive. Your commitment to allergen safety must not only align with legal requirements but it should reflect the highest standards of professionalism and care.**



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