

Allergen guidance for food businesses

As a food business, you must follow the allergen information rules set in [EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation \(EU FIC\)](#). This means that you must:

- provide allergen information to the consumer for both pre-packed and non-prepacked food or drink
- handle and manage food allergens adequately

You also need to make sure that your staff is trained about allergens.

14 allergens

You need to tell your customers if any food products you sell or provide contain any of the main 14 allergens as an ingredient.

The 14 allergens are:

- celery
- cereals containing 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)

This applies also to the additives, processing aids and any other substances which are present in the final product. For example, sulphites, which are often used to preserve dried fruit, might still be present after the fruit is used to make chutney. If this is the case, you need to declare them.

Pre-packed and non-prepacked foods

Different rules apply to pre-packed and non-prepacked foods.

Pre-packed

Pre-packed refers to any food put into packaging before being placed on sale. Food is pre-packed when it:

- is either fully or partly enclosed by the packaging

- cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging
- is ready for sale

Pre-packed food must have an ingredients list. [Allergenic ingredients must be emphasised](#) in some way every time they appear in the ingredients list.

Pre-packed for direct sale

Foods pre-packed for direct sale are foods prepared on the premises where they are sold. For these products, allergen information can be provided in the same way as for non-prepacked (loose) foods.

This does not apply to food products made for sale at retail outlets in other locations.

Non-prepacked (loose) foods

Non-prepacked (loose) foods include:

- foods sold loose in retail outlets, for example cold meats or cheeses sold from delicatessen counter, bread sold in bakery shops, meat sold at butchers, pick and mix confectionery
- foods which are not sold pre-packed, such as meals served in a restaurant and food from a takeaway

If you provide non-prepacked foods, you will have to supply allergen information for every item that contains any of the 14 allergens.

A detailed explanation of the requirements for pre-packed and non-prepacked foods, including how foods must be labelled, can be found in our [technical guidance](#).

Providing allergen information for non-prepacked foods

Direct selling

If you sell or provide food to your customers directly, for example in a restaurant or cafe, you must provide allergen information in writing. This could be either:

- full allergen information on a menu, chalkboard or in an information pack
- a written notice placed in a clearly visible position explaining how your customers can obtain this information - for example by speaking to a member of your staff

You can use this [allergy and intolerance sign](#) to tell your customers how they can find out allergy information.

When allergen information is provided as part of a conversation with a customer, this needs to be backed up by the written information to ensure it is accurate and consistent.

Buffets

If you offer food in the form of a buffet, you need to provide allergen information for each food item separately rather than for the buffet as a whole.

All mandatory allergen information should be easily accessible and visible, and clearly legible to the final consumer regardless of whether they have a food allergy or not.

Distance selling

If food is sold through distance selling, for example through a telephone or online order for a takeaway, allergen information must be provided at two stages in the process:

- before the purchase of the food is completed - this could be in writing (for example on a website, catalogue or menu) or orally (for example by phone)
- when the food is delivered - this could be in writing (for example on allergen stickers on food or enclosed hard copy of menu) or orally (for example by phone)

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

Label takeaway meals clearly, so your customers know which dishes are suitable for those with an allergy.

Handling food allergens in the kitchen

Managing allergen ingredients

You need to ensure that you know what is in the food you provide by recording allergen ingredient information in a written format. Allergen ingredients information should:

- be recorded on product specification sheets
- be included on ingredients labels and ingredients should be kept in original or labelled containers
- be included in recipes or explanations of the dishes provided – you need to consider the impact when recipes change
- be up to date

Controlling cross-contamination

There are different things you can do to prevent cross-contamination with allergens. These include:

- having separate work surfaces, chopping boards and utensils for foods prepared free from one or several allergens and cleaning utensils before each usage, especially if they were used to prepare meals containing allergens.
- storing ingredients and prepared foods separately in closed and labelled containers
- keeping ingredients that contain allergens separate from other ingredients
- washing hands thoroughly between preparing dishes with and without certain allergens

Allergen cross-contamination can happen through using the same cooking oil. For example, to cook gluten-free chips, you can't use the same oil which has been previously used for cooking your battered fish.

If you can't avoid cross-contamination you should tell you customers that you can't provide an allergen-free dish.

More details and guidance on how to manage allergens in the kitchen can be found in the [Safer food, better business pack for caterers](#).

Free-from claims, including gluten-free

Making 'free from claims' for meals require strict controls of ingredients, how they are handled and prepared. This is because a free-from claim is a guarantee that the food is suitable for all with an allergy or intolerance. For instance, if you are handling wheat flour in kitchen and you cannot remove the risk of cross-contamination through segregation by time and/or space, you should let the customer know and not make any gluten-free or wheat-free claims.

The Food and Drink Federation provides specific [information and guidance on free-from claims](#), including gluten-free.

Allergen training

Your staff should:

- know the procedures and policies when asked to provide allergen information
- get training on handling allergy information requests and be able to guarantee that allergen-free meals are served to the right customers
- know the risks of allergen cross-contamination when handling and preparing foods and how to prevent this

Free online training

We provide [free food allergy online training](#) where you and your staff can learn more about food allergies and the allergen information rules.

Resources

[Allergen information for loose foods - advice on the food information regulations](#) (1.87 MB)
[Allergy and intolerance sign](#) (23.74 KB)
[Chef's recipe sheet for allergens](#) (1.56 MB)
[Chef's recipe sheet for allergens \(Word\)](#) (343 KB)
[Dishes and their allergen content - menu chart](#) (1.05 MB)
[Dishes and their allergen content - menu chart](#) (1001.5 KB)

Posters

[Think Allergy poster](#) (529.81 KB)
[Think Allergy Poster Bengali.pdf](#) (500.43 KB)
[Think Allergy Poster Chinese.pdf](#) (524.68 KB)
[Think Allergy Poster Punjabi.pdf](#) (508.32 KB)
[Think Allergy Poster Urdu.pdf](#) (552.05 KB)

Enforcement and penalties

Local authorities enforce the allergen information regulations. If you fail to act on previous advice given by the local authority, an improvement notice may be issued. If you don't meet the requirements of this notice, you will be issued with a penalty.

If you want to appeal an improvement notice, you have 28 days. These 28 days start from the date the notice was issued.