

# Allergen Information for Non-Prepacked Foods Best Practice: Having a conversation about allergen requirements

Having a conversation about allergen requirements and what to do with the information received from consumers.

## Having a conversation about allergen requirements

60. Having a conversation about allergen requirements is extremely important to ensure all necessary information is given to enable food businesses to prepare food and meet allergen requirements and consumers to make a safe and informed choice about what food to eat.

61. Food businesses should encourage consumers to make them aware of any allergen requirements they have and have a conversation about these requirements.

62. Staff should be sufficiently trained to have a conversation about allergens and know where to find the information they need to be able to give accurate information to the consumer. Staff should also receive training on allergens and food hypersensitivity (food allergies, intolerance and coeliac disease) to appreciate the potential consequences of providing incorrect information – which could be life threatening.

63. Food businesses should decide who is best placed to have allergen conversations. For example, are all staff trained to the same level and able to take orders with allergen requirements or are there specific staff on duty whom these orders should be deferred to such as a supervisor or head chef?

64. If a food business decides that specific staff should take these orders, all staff should be aware of this process, how to establish whether customers have allergen requirements and what to do if it is confirmed that they do.

### Tips

#### Example

Front of house staff ask customers “does anyone have any allergen requirements?”

The customer confirms that they do.

Front of house staff reply that they will get the allergen information menu, and a supervisor will take the order when the customer is ready.

The allergen menu is provided to the customer and the supervisor is informed and takes over the order and service process for the remainder of the customer’s dining experience.

When there is only one person working in an establishment, they could do all of the above steps themselves.

65. Having a conversation is important to ensure that:

1. the person preparing the meal is aware of any additional care they may need to take when doing so
2. the consumer understands any potential risks of cross-contamination with allergens in the preparation process
3. it is understood whether meals can be adapted to suit the needs of the consumer
4. the consumer can be made aware of any last-minute changes and has the most up to date information, ensuring the allergen information they receive is accurate

66. Food businesses should ask all consumers whether they have any allergen requirements to encourage these discussions. If a food business is unable to directly ask every customer, then they should display a message on a sign or menu (a combination of both may be more effective), asking consumers to let staff know if they have a food allergy, intolerance or coeliac disease.

67. The placement of this message is extremely important. Signs should be in a prominent position, within a consumers eyeline or placed in a clearly visible place on menus (preferably at the top).

68. Food businesses who do ask consumers directly may also want to display these messages on signs and/or on menus as an additional safeguard.

#### Tips

#### Example

When encouraging consumers to discuss their allergen requirements messages such as the following could be used:

**‘Please talk to us if you have a food allergy, intolerance or coeliac disease. We want to cater safely for everyone’.**

69. When considering how to encourage consumers to discuss their allergen requirements the following principles should be considered:

70. Communication should be:

- **prominent** - effective in getting consumers to notice and observe the message
- **clear** - provide a clear and simple call to action, so consumers understand what is being asked of them (e.g. ‘Please talk to us if you have a food allergy, intolerance or coeliac disease.’)
- **simple** - concise, uses straightforward language and gets to the point (making processing cognitively easy)
- **empathetic** - demonstrates that the food business understands and will endeavour to meet consumer needs (including safety, confidence and providing as normal experience as possible)
- **motivating** - provide a reason why it is important to discuss, or reduces barriers to motivation, for example by demonstrating that staff will react constructively and sensitively

71. To maximise effectiveness when discussing allergen information and consumer needs, the information should again be clear, simple, empathetic, motivating, accurate, comprehensive and consistent.

72. Some customers may feel uncomfortable revealing personal medical information when asked whether they have “a food allergy, intolerance or coeliac disease”. This language has been tested with consumers where it has been shown to be generally preferred, however, asking if they have “any allergen requirements” is a suitable alternative.

73. Once it is established there is some form of allergen requirement, a conversation should include as a minimum:

- what foods the consumer needs to avoid
- whether the consumer has received written allergen information e.g. have they seen the allergen matrix
- risk of cross contact with allergens
- whether the consumer has enough information to make an informed choice about their food e.g. are they happy with the ingredient information and details of other allergens in the kitchen?

74. A conversation could also include:

- whether any adaptations can be made to dishes to make them suitable for the consumer

75. To ensure that conversations are accurate, staff should refer to the written allergen information for consumers or use additional supporting documents providing allergen information specifically for staff such as on a chart, in a recipe book or on ingredient information sheets.

## **What to do with the information received from consumers**

76. When you receive information about a consumer's allergen requirements, it is extremely important that the information is passed to the right people and is acted upon appropriately to ensure the consumer receives a meal that is safe for them.

77. Food businesses should have processes in place to ensure information about consumers allergen requirements are accurately recorded, easy to understand, available to the person preparing the food and the person serving the food (these could all be the same person in some circumstances).

78. One way of doing this could be a written pro forma to complete for allergen requirement information to ensure that all the information required to prepare the food is obtained and passed on. Each business should consider their own set up and decide how best to get this information to the person preparing and serving the food.

79. If the person taking the order and receiving the allergen requirements is not the person preparing the food, or if the order is made digitally, the information should be passed directly to the person preparing the food in writing and there should be confirmation that they have received and understood the information.

80. The person preparing the food should ensure that appropriate allergen management practices are employed during the process (more information on [effective allergen management can be found on the FSA website](#)).

81. It is also crucial that the consumer receives the correct food when it is ready. The food should be easily identifiable for example by placing a label on its container, a flag can be put on top of the food or some other method to ensure it is distinguishable by the person serving the food and the consumer receiving it. The server should also verbally confirm the food meets the allergen requirements e.g. "here's the pasta with no milk".