

# Fact File

## FOOD ALLERGENS



In February 2021, new plain English allergen labelling requirements were introduced for how certain foods known to be common allergens, are declared. All food businesses should be aware of food allergens in order to protect their customers.

Currently there are a number of recognised food allergens which cause 80% of allergies in people, these will need to be declared in the ingredient list when they are present using the exact name, these include:

1. **Gluten** Cereals containing gluten including **barley, oats, rye** and hybridised strains of these products;
2. **Wheat** (including its hybridised strain) irrespective of whether it contains gluten;
3. **Peanuts;**
4. **Soy, soya or soybeans;**
5. **Milk;**
6. **Egg;**
7. **Tree Nuts labelled as: Almond, Brazil Nut, cashew, hazelnut, macadamia, pecan, pine nut, pistachio, walnut;**
8. **Crustacea;**
9. **Mollusc;**
10. **Fish,**
11. **Sesame** sesame seeds;
12. **Sulphites** added sulphites in concentrations of 10 mg/kg or more;
13. **Lupin**

**Please note:** These new requirements also mean that individual tree nuts, molluscs and individual cereals must all be declared separately. Barley, oats and rye must be declared if they contain gluten.

Symptoms of food allergy usually occur within 30 minutes of eating the food and common symptoms can include: low blood pressure, dizziness, faintness, swelling of lips and throat, nausea, feeling bloated, diarrhoea, swelling of tongue or mouth, shortness of breath, itchy skin, rash or hives.

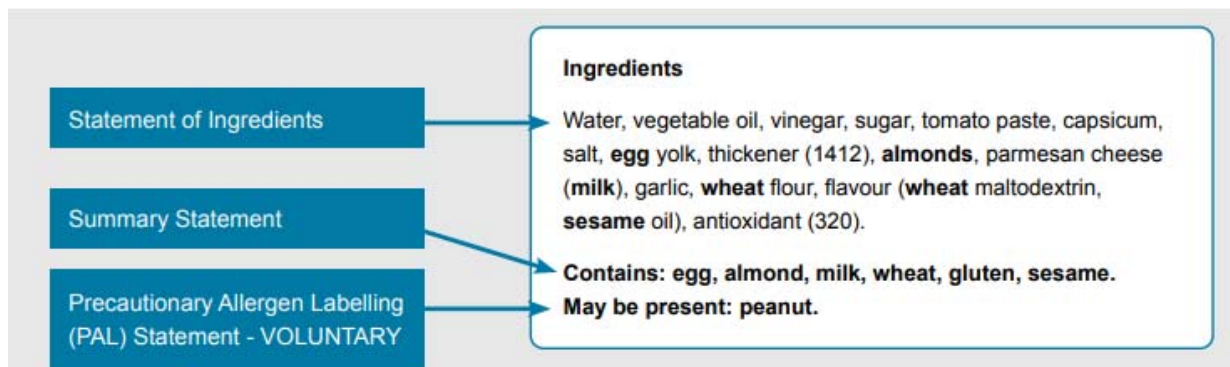
Many people who believe they have a food allergy actually suffer from food intolerance. A food intolerance is a chemical reaction to food rather than an immune response. In some cases, food intolerance involves the inability of the body to digest a food. The most common food intolerances are gluten and dairy (lactose).

## FOOD LABELLING REQUIREMENTS

Food labels provide important information to customers to correctly identify food products which contain allergens.

As a food business operator, you are required by law to declare if your food contains any food allergens listed above in **bold**. These are known to cause allergic reactions and when they are in the food you prepare and sell you could make someone extremely ill to the point of death.

Standard 1.2.3 of the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code makes it a legal requirement to clearly declare allergen ingredients on packaged foods. It is recommended that ingredients that declare allergens are listed in bold as seen below in the statement of ingredients and a summary statement.



Some businesses also include a voluntary precautionary allergen labelling (PAL) statement.

**Please note:** If a food is packaged and labelled before 25 February 2024 and it complies with the existing allergen declaration requirements, then the food can be sold for up to two years

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR FOOD BUSINESSES

It is difficult for a food business to eliminate all food allergens from their kitchen but, if offering a customer an allergen free meal, the meal **must not contain** the allergen. To reduce your risk and provide the most accurate ingredient information possible, food businesses should consider the following advice:

- Avoid labelling a menu item as gluten free or dairy free (or other allergies) unless the food business **can guarantee** that the food does not contain any traces of allergens.
- Use packaged product when declaring a meal is allergy free. Contamination occurs when product is exposed to the allergen, e.g. uncovered salt can be contaminated in open kitchen.
- Minimise the risk of cross contamination by having separate utensils and equipment available to be used to prepare an allergen-free meal, equipment must be stored protected from food allergens and all steps reviewed to control exposure. E.g. cleaning of equipment must be using a new clean sponge in clean wash up area.
- When handling known allergens, take care not to contaminate other surfaces and clean and sanitise all equipment which come into contact with allergens. Please note: Cleaning and Sanitising does not remove food allergen if using contaminated sponges, tea towels, or an unclean dishwasher etc.
- Keep a copy of the label of any foods which have been removed from their original packaging.
- Review product labels to identify hidden ingredients. e.g. hams may contain gluten.
- Train staff on the importance of providing accurate information about the ingredients in food.

- Review labelling when changing suppliers. Check ingredients and declarations on food labels on new product.
- If food is contaminated with an allergen inform staff and customers.
- Stick to standard recipes which are documented so that the ingredients are easy to identify.
- When naming foods on display or in menus use names which include specific ingredients in the description e.g. *fish and almond butter sauce*

## ALLERGEN REQUIREMENTS FOR UNPACKAGED FOODS

For unpackaged food, the law requires accurate food allergen information to be provided to the customer **upon request**. To enable this to be accurately provided it is recommended that the food business develop and maintain an allergen matrix for all menu items or food produced by the food business. An allergen matrix clearly lists common allergens in foods prepared at the food business in a simple table which makes it easy for staff to read and convey to the customer.

### ALLERGEN MATRIX (Sample)

Item	Peanut	Tree nut	Dairy	Egg	Sesame Seed	Fish	Shellfish	Cereals containing gluten & their products	Soy
<i>Lasagne</i>			✓	✓				✓	
<i>Rissoles</i>				✓				✓	
<i>Pesto</i>		✓	✓	✓					

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the Health Protection Unit: 8470 8658.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand - [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

Victorian Department of Health - [www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety)

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia - <https://www.allergyfacts.org.au/>

Food Industry Guide to Allergen Management and Labelling [VITAL - Food Allergen Management](#)

Free online staff training <https://foodallergytraining.org.au/>