**Food allergens, intolerances and general information for customers**

**Goal:** Protect customers with food allergies or intolerances by avoiding cross-contamination and providing accurate information about the presence of allergens and those foods or ingredients to which some people are intolerant.

In the following table ‘allergens’ includes the foods described under ‘what foods cause allergic reactions or intolerances’ on page 49.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can go wrong?</th>
<th>What can I do?</th>
<th>How can I check?</th>
<th>What if it is not right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some people have a reaction to food containing allergens. These people may buy food from you which they do not react to, but the food may be cross-contaminated with allergens from foods they do react to.</td>
<td>Manage food preparation and display to prevent cross-contamination from food containing allergens. When handling foods that contain known allergens, take extra care not to contaminate other foods or equipment.</td>
<td>Observe storage, preparation and display practices to avoid the risk of allergen contamination.</td>
<td>Inform staff about the importance of using clean utensils at all times and of avoiding cross-contamination of food and equipment, particularly when staff switch from working with foods containing allergens to other foods during the same preparation session (for example, use separate utensils). If non-allergenic food may be contaminated with an allergen, make sure that it is not used in the preparation of food that is intended to be allergen-free. If food may include allergens, follow the instructions on the following pages about making information available to customers and staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cleaning might not be preventing cross-contamination of foods containing allergens with other foods

Thoroughly clean and sanitise equipment and work areas. Ensure staff clean and sanitise all equipment and surfaces that come into contact with allergens.

Ask staff whether they understand how to prevent cross-contamination during cleaning.

Include clear instructions in your cleaning arrangements to prevent cross-contamination during cleaning.
### Food allergens, intolerances and general information for customers (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting</td>
<td>Make sure the presence of allergens is declared on any food that is required to bear a label. For example, any pre-packaged food you sell that you received in that package from another food business, or which you made and packaged at another site. Where the food is not required to be labelled, provide information about any allergens:  • on the label (if you choose to label the food) or  • next to or associated with the display of the food (for example, use a sign or ticket or a brochure) or  • provide it to a purchaser or customer upon request. Keep a copy of the ingredient information of any foods that have been removed from their original packaging or labelling.</td>
<td>Check that label and product information is accurate and meets the requirements. Inspect labels of ingredients for the presence of allergens. Review practices and labels regularly, especially for new foods. Check ingredients listed in items on menus. Make sure information about allergens is displayed or available on request about ready-to-eat food that is served to customers or is on display.</td>
<td>Change practices and re-label food so that any label complies with the Food Standards Code. Revise information so it is correct. Insist on getting accurate information about ingredients from suppliers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Not meeting requirements in the national *Food Standards Code* to include other important information for customers about the product such as:  • the name of the food  • the directions for use or storage on labels. | The Code applies in different ways, depending on how food is handled and sold on site. Read and follow the advice that applies to you in the ‘Food labelling and information requirements’ section on page 49. | Check that practices and labels meet the requirements that apply to your business. Review regularly, especially for new foods. | Change practices and labels so that they comply with the *Food Standards Code*. |
### Food allergens, intolerances and general information for customers (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can go wrong?</th>
<th>What can I do?</th>
<th>How can I check?</th>
<th>What if it is not right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Customers may ask about whether a food has allergens or contains ingredients which they have an intolerance to and staff may not know what to tell them. This could be about foods listed in the ‘what foods cause allergic reactions or food intolerances’ section on page 49, or other foods that your customer reacts to. Untrained staff could provide incorrect information which could cause harm to some customers. | Inform staff about the importance of providing accurate information about food and the ingredients in food. Make accurate information about the food and all ingredients available to your staff for them to refer to when serving food or when a customer enquires about any ingredients or allergens. When naming food for display or menus, where possible include known allergens or include specific ingredients in the description of the food (for example, ‘fish with almond butter’). Inform customers about any food that may contain allergens. If customers request food suitable for special dietary requirements due to allergies or food intolerances (whether the query is about a food listed in the ‘what foods cause allergic reactions or intolerances’ section below, or other foods that the customer reacts to), either:  
  - ensure your business complies with the request; or  
  - if you cannot do so, explain this to your customer, so they know not to purchase the food. Do not put your customers’ health or life at risk. | Check staff knowledge and understanding of known allergens, and what allergens and ingredients are present in the food being served. | Re-train staff on allergens and ensure that they can provide accurate information to customers about the food and what allergens and ingredients are present. Require them to check if they are not sure. |
What foods or ingredients cause allergic reactions or intolerances?

Allergens are foods known to cause reactions in allergic people due to an immune response. This can be life threatening. Allergens in foods must be clearly communicated to customers.

As distinct to food allergies, some people experience intolerance to certain foods or ingredients due to a chemical reaction. People's reactions to food intolerances are commonly less severe, but eating these foods can make them unwell.

The most common causes of food allergic reactions or food intolerances are:

- cereals containing gluten and their products, that is: wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt and their hybridised strains, other than where these substances are present in beer and spirits as described in the national Food Standards Code
- shellfish, crustaceans and their products
- eggs and egg products
- fish and fish products
- milk and milk products
- peanuts and peanut products
- soybeans and soybean products
- sesame seeds and sesame seed products
- tree nuts and tree nut products (this does not include coconut)
- added sulphites in concentrations of 10 mg/kg or more (typically in dried nuts, soft drinks and sausages).

NOTE: The term ‘products’ means foods that have this item in their ingredients.

The Food Standards Code requires that the presence of any of these products in a food must be declared when present as:

- an ingredient
- an ingredient of a compound ingredient
- a food additive or component of a food additive
- a processing aid or component of a processing aid.

What are the risks?

Some people have a reaction to food containing allergens.

People's reactions to food allergens varies, but they can be severe and even life threatening. Some people can have a severe reaction to even the smallest trace amount of certain allergenic foods.

People's reactions to food intolerances are commonly less severe but eating these foods can make them unwell.

The food you sell does not comply with the law. Victorian food laws require that your business complies with the Food Standards Code. You must understand and follow the requirements of the national Food Standards Code, including Standards 1.2.1 and 1.2.3.

Food labelling and information requirements

The Food Standards Code includes labelling and information requirements about food. The requirements vary depending upon the nature of the activity and the type of food, whether it is packaged (and if so, when it is packaged). Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) has published an overview of food labelling in a user guide, which is available at <www.foodstandards.gov.au>.
The FSANZ user guide explains in detail what is required.

Most businesses using this template will be small to medium-sized businesses preparing ready-to-eat food for immediate consumption, which is to be consumed on site, or when taken away by the customer. The information below summarises key requirements in the Code that these businesses must follow for these activities.

**Information requirements about food which is ready for immediate consumption by a customer on-site, or when taken away by the customer**

**Labelling**

This food is NOT required to bear a label if any of the following apply:

- the food is not in a package (such as fruit or vegetables, or ready-to-eat food that is served)
- the food is made and packaged at the premises from which it is sold (such as any sandwiches or hot food prepared at the food premises and sold in a package)
- the food is packaged in the presence of the purchaser (such as being placed in a bag)
- whole or cut fresh fruit or vegetables (other than sprouting seeds or similar products) are sold in mesh bags or clear plastic, or other packaging that does not obscure the nature of the food
- the food is delivered packaged, and ready for consumption, at the express order of the purchaser
- the food is displayed in a cabinet from which a person serves food as requested by the purchaser
- the food is sold to the public at a fundraising event (which raises funds solely for a community or charitable cause and not for personal financial gain).

For example:

- you run a deli and you put the deli items in a bag or container in the presence of a customer
- you run a café or restaurant and you only prepare and serve ready-to-eat food
- you run a sandwich bar and you make and package your sandwiches on-site and sell them at the sandwich bar
- you run a bakery and you package your bread on-site for sale direct to customers at the bakery.

**Information required to be available**

In the above situations, the Code still requires that you make some important information available to the purchaser. This is summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>How to comply with the Food Standards Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of food. This must indicate the true nature of the food so the purchaser knows what they are buying</td>
<td>Display information on any label (if food is packaged and you must, or choose, to label) or next to or associated with the display of the food (for example use a sign, ticket or brochure) or provide to the purchaser on request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions for use or storage – but only if the food is of such a nature as to warrant such directions for reasons of health or safety. (This will not be the case if the food is intended to be eaten on-site or straight away when purchased.)</td>
<td>On any label or in information accompanying the food. Example: for packaged high-risk food that is expected to be stored and will be reheated by the purchaser later on at home – ‘Keep refrigerated and cook as directed’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You must comply with these requirements.

The information above is based on key requirements of the Code, as at June 2014.
To check for any future updates on these requirements go to the FSANZ website <www.foodstandards.gov.au>.

If you handle foods in different ways to those described above, check the FSANZ website for more specific requirements about labelling and the provision of information to customers. For example, if:

- you pre-package food at one place to sell at another
- you wholesale food
- you sell raw bamboo shoots or cassava (for customers to take away)
- you use substances such as lactitol or maltitol, or kava or royal jelly
- you formulate caffeinated beverages (this does not include making and serving tea or coffee or selling or serving cans of drink)
- food is produced using gene technology
- you make nutrition, health or related claims
- you sell raw meat, offal or fish to customers
- you prepare food and supply it to someone else who offers it, or uses it to prepare food for immediate consumption (such as a caterer, restaurant, canteen, school or hospital).

To understand the requirements in the Code about declaring allergens, refer to the information in the table on page 47.

**Tips**

- ✓ Set aside a time or work area that is used solely for the preparation of allergen-free foods and use separate utensils for foods that are designated to be allergen-free.
- ✓ If you are placing your own food business label on a pre-packaged item that is already labelled, make sure you don’t cover the existing label as it contains important information for consumers.
- ✓ To find out more about allergens and food intolerances and how you may help customers with questions about them, visit <www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/atoz.htm>.
- ✓ To find out more about information requirements and how you may help customers with questions, see <www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/atoz.htm>.
- ✓ For more information on the current national standards on food labelling and allergens, visit <www.foodstandards.gov.au>. 