

FOOD SAFETY CONVERSATION



Allergen Awareness for Back of House Staff

WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO LEARN

In this Food Safety Conversation we are going to discuss allergies and intolerances, and the controls we should have in place to avoid allergic reactions as well as reactions as a result of an intolerance. Following this conversation, you will understand:

- The difference between allergy and intolerance,
- The importance of following processes, including adhering to recipe specifications,
- The value of good communication with FOH teams,
- How to prevent cross-contact of allergenic to non-allergenic food in the kitchen.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Background

People often get confused between a food allergy and an intolerance. A food allergy is a response by the body's immune system to a food; the reaction can range from mild to severe and for some people even the slightest trace of an allergen can result in a severe response, including potentially fatal anaphylactic shock.

An intolerance is a non-immune system response to eating certain foods, usually because the body is unable to process the food effectively. Symptoms can affect the digestive, skin and respiratory systems, and although not life-threatening, they can make sufferers extremely unwell.

Coeliac disease is a condition where consuming gluten results in the body's immune system attacking its own tissue, causing a range of symptoms, mostly affecting the digestive system and causing potentially significant damage to the intestine.

In the UK and Ireland food business are legally required to provide information on the 14 allergens that must be declared. However, people can be allergic to any food and allergies can be very specific, such a raw vegetable or fruit, or a certain fish species.

Avoiding Cross-Contact

Personal Hygiene: Good personal hygiene, including thoroughly washing your hands between tasks, after handling allergenic foods and before preparing an allergen free dish, is essential. Uniform should be clean and regularly changed. It may be appropriate to wear gloves and/or a disposable apron when preparing an allergen free meal.

Food Storage: All foods must be stored in sealed containers or be tightly covered and must be labelled. In dry stores allergenic foods, such as flour and nuts should be stored in separate areas or below other foods. Any spillages must be cleaned up immediately.

Preparation: Separate equipment and utensils must be used for each dish. Keep pans and trays covered to prevent food from splashing or spilling onto other foods. Allergen free meals should be prepared in a separate area, if possible, and all worksurfaces must be thoroughly cleaned prior to preparation. Equipment and utensils should be washed in a dishwasher to remove all traces of allergenic foods. Complex equipment should not be used for allergen free meals if it has been used for known allergens. Deep fat fryers should be designated for use and should not be used for example for fish and non-fish foods.

Following Recipe Specifications

It is essential that recipe specifications are followed closely - never add or swap an ingredient. Any changes in ingredients will need to be incorporated in the allergen information provided to customers. Be aware that the ingredients of bought-in food items, such as a sauces or stocks, may vary between manufacturers.

Pre-Service and Service

The lead or head chef should brief the kitchen team and the FOH team, including providing information on the menu in respect to allergens, and any pre-ordered allergen free meals.

There must be a copy of the allergen information in the kitchen; this can be in paper form or as a QR code. Make yourself familiar with the allergen information, and if you notice anything missing or a potential error, notify your manager.

To ensure that allergen free meals go to the right person it is essential that there is good communication between the kitchen team and the FOH/BOH manager and/or Allergen Champion. In hospitality settings, allergen free meals should be served first, to prevent customers with allergies from accidentally being served an incorrect meal.