

Title: 2003 Anaphylaxis Australia Inc. (AAI) Food Allergy Survey

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Abstract:

Anaphylaxis Australia surveyed 300 of its members in September 2003 because there was no data in Australia to present to the food industry regarding allergen labelling. The survey asked general questions about the food allergic individual and their age, allergy and most severe allergic reaction. The survey also sought to discover how its members regard food allergen labelling and whether they purchase products with specific labels on them.

Method

A questionnaire was used and there was opportunity for the participants to give a discussion answer to the final question on whether food labels have improved in the past 5 years

Results:

243 members replied to the survey, over an 80% response rate.

The AAI survey included 15 food allergic individuals (FAI) with an age range of 22-57 years as well as 230 parents/carers who had a family member who was an FAI.

Peanut allergies accounted for 88% of the allergies, while 54% had tree nut allergies and 42% had egg allergies. A significant percentage of FAI also had milk, sesame, soy, fish, shellfish and other allergies. Most FAI's were allergic to more than one allergen.

Results were collated on how the most severe allergic reaction had been treated. 1/4 of respondents had been treated with an EpiPen®/adrenaline, 2/3 with antihistamine, over 1/4 with steroids, 1/2 by a GP or allergist, almost 1/2 in an emergency department and 1/3 had received some treatment by family members.

Results also collated regarding food labelling included that,

Almost all of respondents would never purchase food that had no ingredient label and no one would purchase a product with a label in a foreign language that they did not understand.

81% of respondents have called a food manufacturer for more information and 2/3 of the respondents were satisfied with the response given on their most recent call.

3/4 of respondents agreed that food labels had improved in the last 5 years. However, due to the current variations of precautionary statements on food products 65% of respondents believe that ingredient labels are not easy to understand, and 86% believe that not enough information is given about allergens on the ingredient label.

Conclusions:

AAI hopes that the results of this survey will provide good evidence to the food industry for continuing improvements to food labels and interesting data for the allergists and allergy clinic staff, especially nurses working in these environments, which deal with everyday questions from patients with life threatening allergies.