

MEDIA RELEASE
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Food Allergy Week: 90 minutes could save a life (Food Allergy Week - Australia has highest incidence of food allergy in the world)

- **Australia has the highest incidence of food allergy in the world**
- **Mandatory food allergy training vital to preventing deaths**
- This week is Food Allergy Week is (23-29 May 2021)
- Victoria is the ONLY state with an anaphylaxis notification scheme
- One in 10 Australian babies born in Australia will develop a food allergy
- People with food allergy are “responsible for declaring it when eating out... and must always carry their EpiPen® if prescribed”

Australia’s leading allergy support organisation, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, is calling for mandatory food allergy training for all food service staff to help prevent future anaphylaxis, including fatalities.

Australia has the highest incidence of food allergy in the world. One in 10 babies born in Australia will develop a food allergy before their first birthday, and around 800,000 Australians live with a potentially life-threatening food allergy.

This Food Allergy Week (23-29 May 2021) Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA) says increased staff movement in a recovering food service industry poses risks for people with food allergy, who need confidence new staff have completed appropriate food allergy training.

“Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia strongly encourages venue owners to make the [All about Allergens](#) online training course a prerequisite for all food service employees. It’s free, it’s online and it takes just 90 minutes for someone to complete,” said Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO, Maria Said.

“Not only could it save a life, but it could also save someone’s business from the damaging consequences of incorrectly serving an allergen to a person who tells them they have food allergy.

“The responsible service of alcohol certificate is compulsory for everyone working in a venue serving alcohol, and a food allergy training certificate should be compulsory for everyone working with food.”

Fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis increase by around 10 per cent every year.¹ In 2020, 1,768 Victorians (Victoria is the only state that has an anaphylaxis notification scheme) presented to hospital with life-threatening anaphylaxis - 67% as a result of food anaphylaxis, and 29% of those a result of dining out.

“The number of people who presented with life-threatening anaphylaxis was still remarkably high in a year when COVID dramatically affected our lives, especially in Victoria. Most food anaphylaxis emergencies including deaths are preventable. Ninety minutes of education could save a life,” stated Ms Said.

“Food allergies must be taken seriously by everyone, especially when dining out when the risk of an allergic reaction is increased.”

In 2019, a survey conducted with Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia members found one in four had experienced an allergic reaction due to their allergy not being taken seriously by the person preparing their food, and 90 per cent believed eating away from home was a challenge.

“While we’re calling for food allergy training to be compulsory for food service staff, we also want to remind people with food allergy that they must take all reasonable steps to avoid their allergens. A large number of people who experienced food anaphylaxis in Victoria last year, had not in fact disclosed their food allergy to the

food venue.* If you have a food allergy, you're responsible for declaring it to waitstaff, asking questions and making an informed decision on the food you eat, as well as always carrying your EpiPen® and ASCIA Action Plan," stated Ms Said.

"It's up to all of us to be allergy aware. Unfortunately, accidents are never planned, and complacency can kill."

Since 2017-18, 27,225 people have completed the All About Allergens course, with numbers increasing by around 74 per cent each year. A&AA estimates approximately 3,380 people completed the course in the first quarter of this year, already a third of the total completions in 2020.

The All About Allergens training courses were developed by the National Allergy Strategy, an initiative of the leading medical and patient organisations for allergy in Australia – the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia. The National Allergy Strategy received funding from the Australian Government, Department of Health to develop the All about Allergens courses and they were updated in October 2020.

"Positively, allergy training is an issue the food service industry is taking more seriously. We've seen a huge jump in the number of people accessing the online training since the start of the year, when most restrictions started to ease," said Ms Said.

Now in its 18th year, Food Allergy Week (23-29 May 2021) is an awareness week to promote community understanding of food allergy to help protect those at risk.

~ENDS~

Eating Out with Food Allergy Checklist

If you have a food allergy, when eating out:

- Always declare your allergy clearly and discuss the food content with waitstaff.
- Always carry your EpiPen® (if prescribed) and ASCIA Action Plan – accidents are never planned.
- Consider carrying the A&AA Chef Card with details of your food allergy, and hand over when ordering. The wait staff should give the card to the chef and return it with your meal.

If you are wait or kitchen staff:

- Complete the free online All About Allergens training available at foodallergytraining.org.au and let your employer know about it.
- Always ask your customers if they have any food allergies and communicate the allergy verbally and in writing to the kitchen staff. If you are given a Chef Card detailing a food allergy, be sure to hand it to the chef and then return it to the customer with food allergy with their meal.

If you are a venue owner:

- Ensure all your food service staff have completed the free online food allergy training as a requirement of their position.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO Maria Said, please contact:

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Note for Editors

*In 2020, 1,768 people presented to hospital in Victoria with anaphylaxis. 67% (1,187) resulted from food anaphylaxis - 29% (351) of those resulted from unpackaged food from a food premise. This includes takeaway.

Of those 351 people, 265 of them had a medically diagnosed allergy to food.

Of those 265 cases, 135 cases had complete data on whether the person disclosed their food allergy to the food premises.

51% (69) did not disclose their food allergy to the food premises.

A food allergy occurs when a person's immune system reacts to substances in the environment that are harmless to most people. These substances are known as allergens. Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening. Many allergic reactions are mild or moderate. Allergic symptoms including anaphylaxis may occur very soon after eating or most often within 20 minutes to 2 hours after eating.

The most common food allergens are egg, milk, peanut, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy, sesame and wheat.

ⁱ Mullins et al. Anaphylaxis Fatalities in Australia 1997 to 2013. JACI. 2016. 137 (2): Suppl AB57. DOI: 10.1016/j.jaci.2015.12.189