

MEDIA RELEASE

Date: 22 May 2024

Release: **EMBARGOED until Wednesday 22 May 2024**

ALLERGY EXPERTS CALL FOR MANDATORY TRAINING OF FOOD SERVICE TO KEEP 1.5 MILLION AUSSIES SAFE

Food Allergy Week 26 May – 1 June 2024

22 May 2024: Experts have called for mandatory allergy training of food service staff, urging regulators to treat food allergen management as seriously as the responsible service of alcohol.

The push by [Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia](#) (A&AA) and the [National Allergy Council](#) follows the results of two new surveys that highlight gaps in food allergen management and confidence in the system.

The National Allergy Council survey found only a third of food service staff surveyed always asked customers if they had a food allergy and 50% didn't feel confident in answering questions about whether there was a food allergen, such as peanuts, tree nuts or dairy, in a menu item.

While an Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia survey showed 98% of people living with allergies felt anxious and stressed when it came to eating out.

Maria Said AM, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO and Director, National Allergy Council, said food allergen management training was crucial to make it easier and safer for those living with allergies to eat out with more confidence.

"Allergies among Australians are alarmingly common. More than 1.5 million Australians have a food allergy, one of the highest rates in the world," Ms Said stated.

"For this reason, training food service staff about allergens should be taken just as seriously as meeting training requirements for serving alcohol. It should be mandatory and there's really no excuse when the recommended training is available and is free.

"This Food Allergy Week, we are also sending a message to anyone providing food to always ask about food allergies, and to encourage those with food allergies to always speak up about their food allergy. Always Ask. Always Tell."

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia recommends all food service professionals undertake one of the FREE [All about Allergens](#) courses provided by the National Allergy Council. Courses are tailored to different food service settings and take around 60 minutes to complete and are available at foodallergytraining.org.au

Ingrid Roche, Accredited Practising Dietitian and Senior Project Officer for the National Allergy Council, said the survey results show there is room for improvement in the food service sector.

"Everyone needs to be allergy aware because we know that complacency increases the risk of an allergic reaction, including anaphylaxis," Ms Roche said.

"In Victoria alone, 34% of anaphylaxis presentations to emergency departments last year were caused by food purchased from food service providers.

“The All about Allergens online training was designed in consultation with key stakeholders and users of the courses. With 10 different courses available – there is a course for everyone working in food service. We also designed it to be fast, easy and free to make it as accessible to as many people as possible.”

Ms Said wants everyone with a food allergy to feel confident to speak up and to not miss out on socialising.

“People with food allergy can find it difficult to talk about when eating out, and this combined with stress and anxiety can lead to them avoid eating out altogether. Our survey found 84% of people have avoided a social gathering because of their food allergy,” she said.

“In most cases, those not wanting to speak up about their allergy did not want to be a burden or draw attention to themselves. And among the under 18’s, the main barrier was embarrassment.

“Speaking up is vital. You need to ask questions and make an informed decision on the food you eat, and always carry your adrenaline injector (EpiPen® or Anapen®) and ASCIA Action Plan with you. There is never a 100% guarantee an allergic reaction won’t happen so we all need to be prepared.”

The survey also found those with food allergy, and their parents or caregivers, believe it would be easier to tell people about their food allergy if there was ‘more food service training’ on food allergies (86%) and ‘if food service staff asked about allergies’ more proactively (80%).

This week is **Food Allergy Week** (26 May – 1 June 2024) - an awareness week to promote understanding of food allergy to help protect those at risk by educating and supporting both people with food allergy and anyone that serves them food. This year’s theme is: ‘When eating out: Always ask. Always tell’.

Eating Out with Food Allergy Checklist

If you have a food allergy, when eating out:

- Always tell wait staff about your allergy clearly and discuss the food content
- Always carry your adrenaline injector (such as Anapen® or 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 handing it over when ordering. The wait staff should give the card to the chef and return it to you with your meal

If you are wait or kitchen staff:

- Complete the free online ‘All About Allergens’ training available at foodallergytraining.org.au
- Always ask your customers if they have any food allergies and tell the kitchen staff about the allergy. Kitchen staff can then make a meal that doesn’t contain the food the customer is allergic to
- 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 their meal

If you are a food venue owner:

- Ensure all your food service staff have completed the [free All about Allergens online training](#) as a requirement of their position
- Put easy to follow food allergen management procedures in place for all staff: <https://foodallergytraining.org.au/resources/>

ENDS

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

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About the surveys:

- **The Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia Eating Out Survey** was conducted by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia in April 2024 among 299 Australians living with, or caring for people with allergies
- **The National Allergy Council Survey** was conducted by the National Allergy Council in April 2024 among 281 people working in food service

About Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia. A&AA is a charitable, not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve awareness of allergy in the community through education, advocacy and support. A&AA develops a range of educational materials, resources, workshops and seminars. Part of an international alliance of like-minded organisations, A&AA works closely with peak medical bodies including the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA).

About the National Allergy Council. The National Allergy Council is a partnership between the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and A&AA. The National Allergy Council aims to reduce the impact of allergies on the Australian community and health system through implementing the National Allergy Strategy. The National Allergy Council's All about Allergens online training, developed in consultation with key stakeholders and users of the course, provides nationally standardised best-practice training for all people working in food service.