

Media Release

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS URGENT NEED FOR IMPROVED FOOD ALLERGY KNOWLEDGE

Wednesday 29 May, 2019: A new surveyⁱ of Australians living with food allergy has found that more than 80% believe the community confuses the potentially life-threatening medical condition with lifestyle choices, such as being vegan or disliking certain foods.

Despite Australia having the highest incidence of food allergy in the worldⁱⁱ, the survey revealed a concerning lack of understanding about food allergy including:

- 1 in 4 experienced a food allergic reaction due to their allergy not being taken seriously by the person preparing the food
- There are high rates of adverse reactions happening among children at school (41%)
- More than half (54%) of the survey respondents had to wait at least three months to see an allergy specialist, and many were not given the information they needed to best manage their potentially life-threatening allergy safely while waiting for their appointment

The research highlighted that people living with food allergy want the community to be better educated about food allergy. This included restaurants and cafes (89%), schools/preschools/day care centres, (71%), airlines (69%) and even healthcare facilities (54%) such as GP practices, hospitals and aged care.

CEO of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, Maria Said says the research highlights the urgent need for Australians to improve their food allergy knowledge.

“Anyone at any age can develop a food allergy. We need to remove the stigma from this condition, to ultimately help reduce risk, prevent life-threatening emergencies and save lives. Food allergy is not a lifestyle choice.

“Death from anaphylaxis in Australia is on the rise. This is alarming as almost all fatalities as a result of food allergy are preventable.

“While it is up to the individual with food allergy to always read food labels and to communicate their allergy clearly in an effort to avoid the allergen, the community needs to have a basic allergy understanding to help keep those at risk safe.

“An especially challenging period for people is the time between having their first moderate or severe allergic reaction to food and receiving a formal diagnosis by a specialist.

“The lack of allergy awareness in Australia combined with incredibly long wait periods to see an allergy specialist means people with suspected allergy are often left to fend for themselves; they feel anxious about what they can eat. There is also a very real danger as many do not know what anaphylaxis looks like and what to do if anaphylaxis occurs.

“As a health professional myself I am dismayed about the continuing challenges faced by consumers in accessing appropriate care. This is despite the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy having free online training for health professionals available.

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia is calling on healthcare professionals, food service providers, schools as well as the general public to undertake the free online training available at www.allergy.org.au.

“We also encourage anyone with food allergy or suspected food allergy to use the free services of our organisation for allergy support and guidance,” concluded Ms Said.

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia endeavours to make life easier for people living with food allergy, by raising community awareness and offering evidence-based information and useful tools and resources.

This research has been released to coincide with Food Allergy Week, an awareness week to promote community understanding of food allergy and help protect those at risk. For further information please visit www.foodallergyaware.com.au.

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Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA)

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia is a not-for-profit national support organisation that aims to help make living with allergy or caring for someone with allergy a little easier. It provides many helpful resources - from animations that simply explain how to administer potentially life-saving adrenaline (epinephrine) or the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction, to tips on transitioning a child to school with allergy and understanding food labels to best advice for travelling with a food allergy.

A&AA has a Medical Advisory Board and is co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy alongside peak medical organisation, ASCIA.

For further information please visit A&AA’s website www.allergyfacts.org.au and ASCIA’s website www.allergy.org.au.

ⁱ Online survey conducted among 290 people living with a diagnosed food allergy by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia via Survey Monkey in May 2019.

ⁱⁱ [Peters RL](#), [Koplin JJ](#), [Gurrin LC](#), [Dharmage SC](#), [Wake M](#), Ponsonby AL, Tang MLK, [Lowe AJ](#), [Matheson M](#), [Dwyer T](#), [Allen KJ](#); [HealthNuts Study](#). The prevalence of food allergy and other allergic diseases in early childhood in a population-based study: HealthNuts age 4-year follow-up. [J Allergy Clin Immunol](#). 2017 Jul;140(1):145-153.e8. doi: 10.1016/j.jaci.2017.02.019. Epub 2017 May 14.