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# Sesame Allergy Awareness

## A member in Victoria wrote to share her experience:

"We allowed our son who has multiple food allergies to place a lunch order at his school canteen. He wanted a sausage roll. I went to the canteen a few days before and checked the packaging and ingredients of the sausage roll to ensure no nuts, egg or sesame were stated on the actual plastic bag they came individually wrapped in. There was no listing of these allergens although others (soy, wheat etc) were present on the label in bold print and there was also an allergen summary statement. The packaging did not have a 'may contain sesame' statement.

I asked my son and his teacher to visually check the sausage roll for sesame seeds just before eating, to be on the safe side. I got a phone call that lunch hour to say they had found over 10 sesame seeds embedded in the sausage roll pastry, much to my son's disappointment."

The mother contacted the company to enquire why sesame seeds were not listed as a potential allergen. The company responded by saying they didn't know sesame was one they needed to list on their packaging.

Australian food labelling law, Food Standards Code (Standard 1.2.3) lists sesame as one of the 8 major allergens that must be labelled on packaged food products.

These major allergens must be declared on a label if they are used as an ingredient, additive or as a processing aid for the product. The top 8 allergens are: peanut, tree nuts (cashew, almond, pecan etc), egg, milk, crustacea, fish, sesame and soy. These foods and their products must be labelled in the ingredient list if they are present or have been used to process the food product.

'May contain...' labelling is voluntary.

If you find one of the top 8 allergens e.g. sesame in a product where it is NOT labelled as an ingredient, this is reportable and must be followed up by the state Health Department, regardless if the product has a 'may contain sesame' warning on it.

Once you find a sesame seed on a product that 'May contain sesame' the product should be reported as it does contain an allergen that is NOT declared in the ingredient list.

The good news with the above mentioned product is that it was followed up by the Department of Human Services, Food Safety Unit in Victoria.



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The bakery was given clear information on

- major allergen declarations
- how they could reduce the risk of cross contamination of foods in their facility
- how to communicate this risk most effectively with the allergic customer (both on the packaging and verbally if they were asked the question)

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia investigated another report of sesame seed contamination. In this case sesame was found on bread made in the in-house bakery of a major grocery chain.

The bread from the in-house bakery did have a 'may contain sesame seed' statement.

It was purchased by the family of a child who has sesame allergy, but not meant for consumption by the child with sesame allergy. Whilst the child with allergy did not eat this bread, the contamination of the family's kitchen bench, breadboard and utensils became a concern because the bread was covered in sesame seeds.

The take home messages from these cases include:

- It is probably safer to purchase bread from major manufacturers of breads who are more likely to have a greater understanding of food allergens and have stricter manufacturing practices in place
- It is more of a risk to purchase bakery items from smaller bakeries including bread from in-house bakeries of major grocery chains if you are sesame allergic or have someone with sesame allergy at home
- Visually inspect breads and bakery items after you read the ingredient list and before you eat them.

Visual inspection of foods need not be restricted to those with sesame allergy. Visual checks of food can occur after the person asks about content of a food product and/or checks the ingredient list. (E.g. A pastry with a shiny finish has probably been glazed with milk or egg).



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