

Importance of Communication in Allergen Management

Who is the Food Hypersensitive [FHS] Customer?

The FHS customer is someone who has a restricted diet, including food allergies, food intolerances and coeliac disease. This can also include those allergies outside of the #14 major allergens.

Communicating to the FHS customer on how your business can provide for them is a pre-requisite as to whether they will visit or return to your business. Their experience will be reflected in their review of the venue via social media or with friends and family.

What you need to consider

What information is available to the FHS customer before they have decided to visit your business? Have you considered what menu information is provided on your website and social media?

Is there clear information regarding how the FHS customer can expect their visit to be managed from booking to serving?

Do you have an allergy policy? Is it easily available for the FHS customer to explore prior to visiting your business?

Having disclaimers in place is not going to provide the FHS customer with a sense of welcoming that other non FHS customers would receive. You would not have a disclaimer regarding food safety so you should not have one regarding food allergies. **Note:** A signed disclaimer is not valid in a UK court in this instance.

Communication Tools

- **Website:** The website should have clear menu information, if allergen information is available, it should be readable and correct. Finding errors on allergen sheets will turn the FHS customer away.
- **Allergen Policy** – an external allergen policy should be easily accessible on the website it should state what you can and cannot do, offering further information as applicable. The policy should be based on your internal policy and procedures, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), and you look at ways to reduce the risk of cross contamination for the FHS customer in all your processes.
- **Bookings** – when taking bookings encourage staff to ask about dietary requirements and note any allergen requests. If they have multiple allergies request a contact number for the chef to speak to them directly.
- **Apps** – These can be restrictive depending on how the dishes are listed. If each part of the dish has the allergens listed it is easier e.g., sauces are separate to the main dish that they accompany.

Staff

- **Servers:** when taking orders encourage staff to ask about dietary request on guest arrival, this will give ample time to prepare and clean areas.
- **Allergy experts:** In any organisation it is recommended that an 'Allergy Champion' or 'Allergy Expert' is on each shift. They can be front or back of house (or both) and they will have had extensive training to Level 3 and attend Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to keep their knowledge updated.
- **Functions/Casual Staff:** Functions can be high risk if ad hoc staff are drafted in from agencies. If this is the case, there should be a set process in place and at the start of each function a management briefing is required to highlight who is responsible for the FHS customer(s) and brief them on how they are managed.

Information and Admin

Allergen Books/Folders Matrix's: Either online or manual copies, ensure there is accurate in date information, specials should be included. Do not overuse 'May contains' labels, verify information from suppliers if unsure.

Menu planning: Check your availability of menu items, review the content of the #14 standard allergens. What choices can you offer?

Reporting: When a customer highlights an issue with a product or service which is related to something they have or could react too, it should be highlighted by the server/management team within the food management system or Safer Food Better Business (SFBB), if appropriate, to log the customers issued.