

Food safety BYTES

Number: 2 Allergens II

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Allergen labelling

All pre-packed food must be labelled with all of the ingredients included in it. Allergenic ingredients must be declared and have a clear reference to the allergen, for example, whey (milk), tofu (soya). Allergen advice statements can also be used on the label to explain how information for allergens is presented, for example, 'Allergen advice: allergen ingredients in bold'.

Precautionary allergen labelling

This should only be used after a risk assessment and when the risk of allergen cross contamination is real and cannot be removed.

If there is a real risk to a product being allergen cross contaminated, the label should state either, 'may contain ...' or 'not suitable for someone with an allergy to...'

Free-from labelled foods

These are foods made completely free of the allergens stated on the label based on rigorous controls. These controls include checking that all of the ingredients and the packaging materials do not contain the allergen and that cross contamination is prevented.

However, there is one exception to the rule – gluten. Gluten-free labelled foods can contain a maximum of 20mg/kg of gluten.

Cross contamination

Cross contamination occurs when traces of allergens get into products accidentally. This can happen during manufacturing, handling, transport or storage of foods. Cross contamination can be avoided with careful management, staff awareness, separate production facilities, storing ingredients separately and regular cleaning, to name a few.

Allergen specific testing

Testing for the presence of specific food allergens helps to safeguard manufacturers against undeclared allergens entering the final product. It also minimises the risk of product recalls.

Environmental swabs can also be taken as part of an effective quality control procedure after an area has been sanitised, helping to verify the efficacy of a cleaning procedure and identifying sources of cross contamination.