

ALLERGY AWARENESS TRAINING DOCUMENT

For Event Workers in Hotels, Catering and Restaurants

London Hospitality | Event Staffing

Required reading for all front-of-house staff before commencing work

UK Food Information (Amendment) Regulations 2021
Food Standards Agency Compliant

1. Why Allergy Awareness Matters

This section explains the legal framework and the real-world consequences of allergy incidents in the workplace.

Food allergies are a serious and growing public health issue in the UK. Around 2 million people in the UK live with a diagnosed food allergy. Allergic reactions can range from mild discomfort to life-threatening anaphylaxis. As a front-of-house worker, you are often the last line of defence between a guest and a potentially fatal error.

The Law

The UK Food Information (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (known as Natasha's Law) requires all food businesses to provide full ingredient lists and allergen labelling on any food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS). This builds on the EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation (FIC), which remains applicable in UK law post-Brexit.

There are 14 major allergens that must be declared by law whenever they are used as ingredients in food or drink.

Natasha's Law: What It Means for You

You must never guess about ingredients. If you don't know, you must find out before the food reaches the guest. Saying 'I think it's fine' is not acceptable. It is your legal and moral responsibility to escalate any allergen query to the kitchen or a supervisor immediately.

Real Consequences

The following consequences can result from poor allergen practice:

- A guest could die. Anaphylaxis can be fatal within minutes if untreated.
- Criminal prosecution can follow. Business owners and individuals have faced prosecution and imprisonment.
- Civil liability for the venue, the staffing agency, and potentially you personally.
- Closure of the business by environmental health authorities.
- Permanent reputational damage to the venue and its operators.

Case Note: Natasha Ednan-Laperouse

Natasha's Law is named after a 15-year-old who died in 2016 after eating a baguette containing sesame seeds that were not listed on the label. Her death led directly to the 2021 legislation. This is not a box-ticking exercise. It is a life-or-death responsibility.

2. The 14 Major Allergens

You must be able to name all 14 allergens. These are the ones you will encounter most frequently in London hospitality venues.

No.	Allergen	Common examples	Potential reaction
1	Celery	Celery sticks, celeriac, soups, stocks, Worcestershire sauce	Anaphylaxis, swelling, hives
2	Cereals containing gluten	Wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, kamut. Bread, pasta, pastry, beer, coatings	Severe gut reaction, anaphylaxis in those with wheat allergy
3	Crustaceans	Prawns, crab, lobster, langoustine, crayfish	Rapid anaphylaxis, often severe
4	Eggs	Mayonnaise, pasta, cakes, quiche, sauces, glazes, meringue	Hives, swelling, anaphylaxis
5	Fish	Bass, cod, haddock, plaice, salmon, anchovies in sauces and dressings	Anaphylaxis, vomiting, hives
6	Lupin	Lupin flour in pastry, bread, pasta, pancakes	Anaphylaxis, especially in those with peanut allergy
7	Milk	Butter, cream, cheese, yoghurt, ghee, milk powders, whey	Anaphylaxis, gut reaction, hives
8	Molluscs	Mussels, oysters, squid, octopus, scallops, clams	Anaphylaxis, swelling
9	Mustard	Mustard seeds, powder, oil, leaves. In dressings, marinades, curries	Anaphylaxis, skin reactions
10	Peanuts	Groundnuts, satay, peanut oil, some curries and sauces	One of the most common causes of fatal anaphylaxis
11	Sesame	Sesame seeds, tahini, hummus, sesame oil, some bread and crackers	Increasingly common cause of anaphylaxis
12	Soya	Tofu, tempeh, edamame, miso, soy sauce, many processed foods	Anaphylaxis, gut reaction
13	Sulphur dioxide and sulphites	Dried fruits, wine, beer, cider, vinegar, some processed meats	Asthma-type reactions, anaphylaxis in severe cases
14	Tree nuts	Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans, pistachios, Brazil nuts, macadamia	One of the most common causes of fatal anaphylaxis

Hidden Allergens: What to Watch For

Many allergens appear in unexpected places. Soy sauce contains wheat. Stock cubes contain celery. Pesto contains nuts. Caesar dressing contains fish (anchovies). Lupin flour is used in some gluten-free products. Never assume a dish is free from an allergen without checking with the kitchen.

3. Your Responsibilities as a Front-of-House Worker

Your role may be temporary, but your responsibility is permanent for the duration of every shift.

Before Your Shift

- Attend any pre-shift briefing and note any dishes on the menu that contain major allergens.
- Find out who the head chef or kitchen supervisor is and how to reach them quickly.
- Ask whether the venue has an allergen matrix or allergen menu available for guests.
- Know where the EpiPen (adrenaline auto-injector) is kept and who is first-aid trained on shift.

When a Guest Raises an Allergen Query

Follow this process every time, without exception:

1. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt. Let the guest tell you exactly what they cannot eat.
2. Write it down or repeat it back clearly to confirm you have understood correctly.
3. Do not guess. Do not say 'I think that's fine' or 'it should be okay.'
4. Go directly to the kitchen or supervisor to check with the person who prepared the food.
5. Return to the guest with a clear, confirmed answer.
6. If in doubt, recommend an alternative or tell the guest you cannot guarantee the dish is safe.
7. Note the allergen request so that the kitchen can prepare the dish separately if required.

If You Are Not Sure: Always Escalate

It is never your job to make a final call on whether a dish is safe for a guest with an allergy. That decision must come from the kitchen. Your job is to ask the right question and bring back a confirmed answer. If the kitchen cannot confirm, tell the guest honestly.

Handling Allergen Requests at Events

At catered events, banquets, and receptions, additional steps apply:

- Event guests with dietary requirements should have been flagged in advance by the client. Check with your event manager before service begins.
- Guests with confirmed allergies should have their meal individually identified and brought to them separately.
- At buffets and canape receptions, ensure allergen information is displayed clearly or available on request.
- For drinks service: be aware that some wines contain sulphites and some beers contain gluten or nut flavourings.
- Never allow a guest to self-serve from a buffet without first directing them to allergen information.

Cross-Contamination

Cross-contamination is one of the most common and preventable causes of allergic reactions. It occurs when allergen-containing food comes into contact with allergen-free food through shared surfaces, utensils, or handling.

- Always use clean serving utensils for each dish. Never use the same spoon across multiple dishes.
- If a guest has a nut allergy and you have just handled a dish containing nuts, wash your hands before serving them.

- Alert the kitchen when a dish needs to be prepared separately for an allergic guest. This must be done with clean equipment.
- Do not assume that removing a garnish (such as a nut or crouton) from the top of a dish makes it safe. It does not.

4. Recognising and Responding to an Allergic Reaction

Speed is critical. A reaction can escalate from mild to life-threatening in under ten minutes. Know what to look for and what to do immediately.

Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction

Symptoms can appear within seconds or up to two hours after exposure. They range from mild to severe:

Mild symptoms	Moderate symptoms	Severe (Anaphylaxis)
Tingling or itching in the mouth Skin rash or hives Runny nose Watery or red eyes	Swelling of lips, tongue or throat Stomach pain, nausea or vomiting Diarrhoea Difficulty swallowing	Difficulty breathing or wheezing Severe swelling of face and throat Drop in blood pressure, dizziness, collapse Loss of consciousness

Emergency Response: Step by Step

ANAPHYLAXIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If you believe a guest is having an anaphylactic reaction, do not wait. Do not ask a supervisor first. Call 999 immediately.

- Call 999. Tell them you have a suspected anaphylactic reaction. Give the venue address clearly.
- If the guest has an EpiPen, help them use it (or use it on them if they cannot do so themselves and you have been trained). The EpiPen goes into the outer thigh.
- Lay the guest down flat with their legs raised, unless they are having difficulty breathing (in which case, help them sit up slightly).
- Do not leave the guest alone. Stay with them until the ambulance arrives.
- Alert your manager or supervisor immediately after calling 999.
- Do not give the guest food or drink.
- If the guest loses consciousness and stops breathing, begin CPR if you are trained to do so.

After an Incident

All allergic reactions that occur on shift must be reported to your supervisor and documented, however minor they appear. An incident report must be completed before you leave the venue. This protects the guest, the business, and you.

5. Venue-Specific Guidance: Hotels, Caterers and Restaurants

Different types of venue present different allergen challenges. This section covers what to expect in each environment.

Hotels and Banqueting

- Pre-function sheets should list any dietary requirements for guests. Read these before service begins.
- For set banquets, know which dishes are being served and which contain the 14 allergens before guests are seated.
- Guests with allergies at banquets should have their meal flagged with the kitchen in advance. Confirm with the kitchen manager that the dish has been prepared safely.
- For room service, allergen information must be available and you must know how to access it.
- Mini-bar items and pre-placed snacks (nuts, biscuits) should be clearly labelled. If they are not, flag this to your supervisor.

Catered Events and Private Dining

- At private events, the client should have submitted dietary requirements ahead of the event. Confirm with the event manager that these have been communicated to the kitchen.
- At canape receptions, each canape should be labelled or accompanied by an allergen card. If this has not been done, do not begin service until it is.
- Staff carrying trays must know the contents of what they are serving. Brief the kitchen on which canapes you are carrying before leaving the service area.
- At buffets, ensure allergen information is either displayed on the food or available as a printed menu on request.
- For food stations (pasta bar, carving station, etc.), the person running the station must have full allergen knowledge of what they are serving.

Restaurants

- Know the menu. You should understand what is in every dish you are serving. If you do not, ask the kitchen before service.
- When a guest asks about allergens, always use the venue's allergen matrix or allergen menu. Do not rely on memory alone.
- If the kitchen cannot confidently provide an allergen-free version of a dish, be honest with the guest. Do not say 'we'll try our best.'
- Allergen information must be available in writing in restaurants. If a guest asks, you must be able to provide it.
- For set menus or chef's menus, allergen queries must be raised at the time of booking and confirmed again on arrival.

6. Scenario Practice

The following scenarios test your understanding. Review the correct responses and discuss any uncertainty with your supervisor before starting your shift.

Scenario	Wrong response	Correct response
A guest tells you they have a severe nut allergy and asks if the chocolate tart contains nuts.	"I don't think it does, it should be fine."	"I'll check with the kitchen right now and come straight back to you with a confirmed answer."
A guest with a gluten allergy asks you to remove the croutons from their salad so they can eat it.	You remove the croutons and serve the salad.	You explain that removing croutons doesn't make the dish safe due to cross-contamination, and you take the query to the kitchen for a separately prepared option.
You are carrying canapes and a guest asks what is in them.	"I'm not sure, but they're very popular!"	You tell the guest exactly what is in the canape. If unsure, you step back to the kitchen to confirm before serving.
A guest begins scratching their neck and says their mouth feels tingly after eating.	You offer them a glass of water and say it will probably pass.	You take it seriously immediately. You alert your supervisor, ask the guest if they have any medication, and prepare to call 999 if symptoms worsen.
A guest asks if your vegan dish is also nut-free.	"Yes, it's vegan so it won't have nuts in it."	You explain that vegan and nut-free are separate requirements, and you check the allergen information for that specific dish with the kitchen.
The kitchen tells you a guest's allergen-free meal is 'the same as everyone else's but without the sauce.'	You accept this and serve it.	You query whether the dish was prepared separately with clean equipment, or whether it is simply the standard dish with the sauce removed. If not prepared separately, you escalate.

7. Quick Reference

Keep this section in mind throughout every shift. If in doubt on any point, refer back here.

The Golden Rules

- **Never guess. Always check.**
- **Never say 'should be fine.' Say 'I'll confirm with the kitchen.'**
- **Never remove an allergen from a dish and assume it is safe.**
- **Always escalate to the kitchen or supervisor before giving a final answer.**
- **Always take any allergic reaction seriously, however mild it appears.**
- **Always call 999 first in a suspected anaphylaxis emergency.**