



County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency ♦ Environmental Health Division

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Major Food Allergens

California Retail Food Code requires that the “person in charge” and all food employees have adequate knowledge and training regarding their assigned duties. In addition, this knowledge and training must include information about major allergens, foods identified as major allergens and symptoms associated with an allergic food reaction. The “person in charge” is responsible for having this knowledge and educating staff with this knowledge. The person in charge can use a poster or job aid that can be used to refer to at the facility. A poster link is available below.

California Law currently requires that Food Safety Certification training include information about allergens and symptoms of an allergic reaction. Effective January 1, 2021, the Natalie Giorgi Sunshine Act was passed expanding this training to Food Handler courses. Training must include knowledge of major allergens, foods identified as major allergens and symptoms associated with an allergic food reaction. In addition, food handler courses must include information about safe food handling practices for major allergens, as they relate to food preparation activities that occur at a food facility, including, but not limited to training on the avoidance of allergen cross contact. Food Handler Cards must be renewed every three years. Personnel subject to food handler card requirements must ensure that they receive training including the new allergen requirements.

California Retail Food Code section 113820.5 defines “**Major Allergens**” as:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Fish (including, but not limited to, bass, flounder, and cod)
- Crustacean shellfish (including, but not limited to, crab, lobster, and shrimp)
- Tree nuts (including, but not limited to, almonds, pecans, and walnuts)
- Wheat
- Peanuts
- Soybeans
- A food ingredient that contains protein derived from any of the above listed foods

Major Food Allergens **do not include**:

- A highly refined oil derived from the foods specified above and any ingredient derived from that highly refined oil e.g. peanut oil.
- An ingredient that is exempt under the petition or notification process specified in the federal Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-282).

Symptoms of a food allergy may occur within a few minutes or up to two hours after a person has consumed a food. Symptoms may include:

- Hives
- Flushed skin or rash
- Tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth
- Face, tongue, or lip swelling
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Coughing or wheezing
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Swelling of the throat and vocal cords
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness
- Death

Each year, millions of Americans have allergic reactions to food. Although most food allergies cause relatively mild and minor symptoms, some food allergies can cause severe reactions, and may even be life-threatening.

There is no cure for food allergies. Strict avoidance of food allergens and early recognition and management of allergic reactions to food are important measures to prevent serious health consequences. Following ingestion of a food allergen(s), a person with food allergies can experience a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis.

It is important to be aware and prepared to handle customers with allergies. The following are some suggestions:

- **Be Aware**
Train staff to know what causes allergies, recognize allergens, recognize signs of an allergic reaction and how to take measures to prevent cross-contamination
- **Be Prepared**
Make sure there is always someone that is knowledgeable with your menu and can answer questions by customers regarding foods containing allergens
- **Label**
Make sure that food containing allergens are properly labeled
- **Separate**
Take measures to keep foods containing allergens separate
- **Protect**
Take measure to wash hands, sanitize surfaces, and prevent cross contact between foods that cause allergies and other consumables

Below are some useful links to information about food allergies and best practices to prevent food allergies in a retail food setting:

General information about food allergies by the FDA:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/what-you-need-know-about-food-allergies>

Resources for restaurant operators:

Food Allergy Research & Education Training Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLhYgo2ltNw&list=UUE_125yu_QxOM0PXPOKj93w&index=17

Food allergy awareness posters:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/food-allergen-awareness-poster-2009/download> (English)

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/food-allergen-awareness-poster-2009-spanish/download> (Spanish)

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/food-allergen-awareness-poster-2009-simplified-chinese/download> (Chinese)

The above references are not a replacement to the training requirements noted above.

Please contact the Environmental Health Division at (831) 454-2022 regarding any allergen questions. District health inspection staff is generally in the office between 8AM and 9AM Monday through Friday (excluding holidays).

