

Estates and Facilities Alert

EFA-2020/001

Issued: 29 January 2020

Valid until: 29 January 2022

Allergens Issues - Food Safety in the NHS

Summary

Recently there have been several incidents relating to allergens in hospital food reported. The consistent themes are lack of information and/or communication regarding food allergens present in the food and/or details of the patient's known food allergy.

Action

1. Review menus to ensure allergen information is clear, consistent and in line with current legislation
2. Review systems to ensure that correct labels/allergen information are applied to the actual food item as well as on the menus
3. Ensure all staff involved in the preparing and serving of food have training to the appropriate levels in allergen management
4. Work towards default labelling (e.g. everything labelled as either 'does not contain nuts' or 'may contain nuts' or 'contains nuts')¹
5. Ensure there is clear information available throughout the organisation advising those suffering from food allergies about who to inform and how
6. Use any accepted standardised abbreviations for allergens on menus (e.g. GF). If there isn't one, be clear and spell it out in full with **bold**
7. The organisation must report any food allergy related patient safety incidents via their incident reporting systems. Ensure any incidents involving food allergens, are investigated and any learning identified is communicated to others and relevant actions taken, regardless of whether actual harm has been caused
8. Review current policy on allergens and ensure it has guidance on controlling risks that may present at charity fundraising food events e.g. bake sales.

Action by

- Director of Estates and facilities
- Directors of Nursing
- Dietetic Teams
- Catering Managers
- Facilities Managers
- Head Chefs.

Deadlines for action

Actions underway (e.g. added as agenda item to a relevant meeting): 12/02/2020

Actions complete: 12/08/2020

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- ¹ In safety terms this is better than exception labelling (e.g. no label unless the food contains nuts) as exception labelling creates a risk that working on a hospital with one system will make unsafe assumptions when moving to another hospital.

Problem / background

The incidents relating to allergens in hospital food that have been reported² These described consistent themes relating to lack of information and/or communication regarding food allergens present in the food and/or details of the patient's known food allergy.

Over half of these incidents were due to an incorrect meal being delivered to the patient. Several incidents were due to an inappropriate menu choice, either chosen by the patient or staff member. In three of the incidents the cause was not described. Other incidents were due to out-dated allergen information, patient allergies not communicated to kitchen staff, incorrect advice from kitchen staff and conflicting information regarding a patient's allergy.

Most incidents were due to an incorrect meal being delivered from the kitchen to the ward. Reasons for this were not commonly described, however there was some evidence of inappropriate food substitutions by kitchen staff, in addition to lack of knowledge and understanding of both kitchen and ward-based staff.

Whilst most incidents did not cause serious harm to patients, there were 3 incidents that described patients developing an 'anaphylactic reaction'.

Whilst there is legislation regarding the information that should be provided to patients, staff and visitors about the presence of specified allergens in food, there is evidence from these incident reports that the necessary safeguards that should be implemented, from the point that the patient orders their meal to the point that the food is delivered to the patient, are not consistently in place to prevent risk of harm to patients.

Distribution

Directors of Estates & Facilities, Directors of Nursing, Dietetics, Ward based staff, Catering staff, Catering Managers, Facilities Managers, Allied Health Professional Leads who are working in NHS Trusts and Community Health and Social Care Facilities.

References

- Allergens Issues - Food Safety in the NHS – Letter to the service issued along with this alert 29 January 2020.
- For further information The Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:304:0018:0063:EN:PDF>
- The Nutrition and Hydration Digest: Improving outcomes through Food and Beverage Services. BDA 2012
<https://www.bda.uk.com/publications/professional/NutritionHydrationDigest.pdf>
- BDA (2014) Allergen Toolkit for Healthcare Catering.
www.bda.uk.com/publications/professional/food_allergen_toolkit_food_counts

² National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS) data extracted 10 May 2019 where incident date was 10 May 2017 or later and free text included the terms %_menu% AND %_allergen%

- Food Standards Agency (2017) Resources for Allergen Information.
www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/allergy-guide/allergen-resources
www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-institutional-caterers
www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses
www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-labelling-for-food-manufacturers

Enquiries

This alert has been compiled under a partnership arrangement by the organisations below and it has been distributed across the UK. Enquiries should be directed to the appropriate Regional Office quoting the alert reference number **EFA-2020/001**.

England

Enquires should be addressed to: nhsi.mb-defectsandfailures@nhs.net

Reporting adverse incidents in England

Defects or failures should be reported on this system: <http://efm.hscic.gov.uk/>

The web-based D&F reporting system is managed by the NHS Digital on behalf of NHS Improvement. For further information on this system, including obtaining login details, please contact the efm-information Helpdesk. Tel 0300 123 2106.

Northern Ireland

Enquiries and adverse incident reports in Northern Ireland should be addressed to:

Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre, CMO Group,
Department of Health
Tel: 028 9052 3868 Email: niaic@health-ni.gov.uk
<http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/niaic>

Reporting adverse incidents in Northern Ireland

Please report directly to NIAIC using the [forms on our website](#).

Scotland

Enquiries and adverse incident reports in Scotland should be addressed to:

Incident Reporting and Investigation Centre (IRIC)
Health Facilities Scotland, NHS National Services Scotland
Tel: 0131 275 7575 or E-mail: nss.irc@nhs.net

Reporting adverse incidents in Scotland

Please report directly to IRIC here: [how to report an adverse incident](#)

Wales

Enquiries and adverse incident reports in Wales should be addressed to:

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership – Specialist Estates Services
4th Floor, Companies House, Crown Way, Cardiff CF14 3UB
Tel: 029 2090 4118 or E-mail: efa.ses@wales.nhs.uk