

Food Alert

Top mistakes in allergen management and how to avoid them



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Managing allergens is a critical responsibility for any food business, whether you're in hospitality, manufacturing or supplying. Mistakes in allergen management can lead to some serious consequences, including financial penalties, reputational harm and in the worst cases, risks to customer safety. So, we're here to outline the most common errors food businesses make when it comes to allergen management and provide some steps to help you avoid them.

1 Failing to provide accurate allergen information

The mistake

It's easy to provide incomplete or incorrect allergen information or fail to make it easily accessible to customers. This can lead to serious reactions for allergy sufferers and significant legal repercussions for your business.

How to avoid it

- Clearly label all prepacked food for direct sale (PPDS) with a full list of ingredients and allergens highlighted, as required by Natasha's Law – make sure ingredients and allergens on the labels are correct, and that the right label is applied to the right food
- Make sure accurate allergen information for non-prepacked foods is provided for your customers in writing, either through menus, allergen information packs, or digital formats, and ensure there is clear communication about allergens between staff and guests
- Verify allergen information regularly to make sure it's up to date and accurate
- Put a review process in place where allergen information is checked against supplier data and legislation updates

2 Overlooking allergen cross-contact risks

The mistake

Cross-contact in storage, preparation or service can unintentionally introduce allergens into dishes or products. For example, shared cooking oils or improperly cleaned equipment can cause significant issues.

How to avoid it

- Store allergenic ingredients separately, ideally in clearly labelled, sealed containers
 - Use colour-coded equipment for preparing foods without allergens, for example, knives, chopping boards and utensils
 - Follow strict cleaning procedures, including a two-stage cleaning process (detergent and sanitiser or disinfectant) before preparing foods without allergens
 - Designate specific areas in the kitchen for preparing foods without allergens whenever possible
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3 Insufficient allergen training for staff

The mistake

Untrained or poorly trained staff might provide the wrong information, mishandle allergen requests, or fail to follow the right procedures for preventing cross-contact.

How to avoid it

- Train all employees on allergen management, including proper handling of allergen-related enquiries and cross-contact prevention practices
- Make sure team members complete their training within defined timeframes
- Appoint an “allergy hero” – a staff member with advanced allergen training who acts as the go-to person for allergen-specific questions. Just remember this isn't in replacement of training everyone on the right procedures – it's a nice-to-have and everyone should know what to do
- Partner with professional, accredited training bodies to deliver accessible and up to date allergen training for your team

4 Poor monitoring of supply chains

The mistake

Assuming that labelled products do not contain specific allergens without confirming with suppliers can lead to unintended risks. For example, some vegan products have been found to contain traces of milk or eggs due to insufficient supply chain checks.

How to avoid it

- Ask suppliers to provide evidence of their allergen management practices, including certificates or documented procedures
- Don't assume your suppliers never change their product recipes or will automatically let you know when they do – make sure you agree a substitution policy with them in case their recipe changes introduce new allergens
- Regularly audit your supply chain to confirm they're compliant with your allergen control standards
- Don't rely solely on packaging claims like 'vegan' or 'free-from' – always verify with the product manufacturer
- Establish a standardised checklist for vetting new suppliers and revalidating current ones



5 Failing to plan for high-risk situations

The mistake

Events like group bookings or buffets increase the likelihood of errors in allergen management. For example, insufficient labelling of buffet items or mishandling allergy orders during busy periods can result in mistakes.

How to avoid it

- Label each buffet item and keep allergen-containing foods separate
- For group bookings, collect allergy information from customers in advance and share it with the kitchen team – be prepared to double-check this information closer to the event date in case of any changes
- Use distinguishable markers, such as coloured plates or allergy flags to make sure meals prepared without allergens reach the right customer
- Create a standard operating procedure (SOP) for managing allergen safety during high-risk events

6 Insufficient record-keeping

The mistake

Not keeping records of allergen controls, staff training or supplier checks can leave your business vulnerable if something goes wrong.

How to avoid it

- Use management software to track allergen audits, complaints and non-conformances
- Maintain detailed logs of staff training sessions, supplier communications and allergen control checks
- Review and update records following any procedural changes

Customers really do notice when you go the extra mile to provide safe and inclusive dining experience – so small efforts in allergen management can lead to big wins for customer loyalty and trust. To find out more about allergen management in your business, take a look at our [ultimate guide to allergen management!](#)



7 Neglecting drinks and finishing touches

The mistake

It's easy to overlook allergens in drinks or garnishes, such as milk in coffee foam, egg whites in cocktails or sesame in dressings, leading to unintended exposure.

How to avoid it

- Include drinks and garnishes in your allergen information and make sure it is kept up to date and accurate
 - Establish clear cleaning and preparation protocols for drink orders and garnishes
 - Use separate preparation tools and cleaning processes when preparing orders preparing without allergens
 - Make sure options like non-dairy milk are clearly communicated and properly used
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8 Failing to communicate effectively

The mistake

Poor communication between staff and customers can lead to misunderstandings and preventable mistakes.

How to avoid it

- Train all s teams
- Have a conversation about allergens with your guests - encourage open communication to flag potential allergen risks early
- Introduce visual tools like allergen charts to support communication and simplify allergen identification
- Hold regular team meetings to review allergen protocols and strengthen internal communication

Take action with Food Alert's support

Allergen management doesn't have to be overwhelming. With proper training, robust procedures and the right tools, you can eliminate costly mistakes and make sure everyone stays safe. Need any additional guidance? **Food Alert's experts are here to help.**

Get in touch today to see how our tailored support, training and supply chain solutions can help you stay ahead in allergen management. To find out more, just **visit our website** or call us on **020 7244 1900**.

