



May 2009

Food Safety not just about bacteria and listeria Working toward Food Allergy SMS – Serving Meals Safely

This Food Allergy Awareness Week May 17 -23, Anaphylaxis Australia is calling on individuals at risk of severe food allergic reactions, their carers AND those who serve them to be allergy aware. A multi pronged approach to management is required by all. Food allergy is difficult to manage but it can be made easier if communities are aware.

The increase in prevalence of food allergy means we have more people at risk of life threatening reactions depending on safe foods purchases. Risk can never be totally removed but it can be greatly reduced if we work together to educate those in the food service sector as well as individuals at risk.

Maria Said, president of Anaphylaxis Australia reminds us that, "Most people who have lost their lives as a result of food anaphylaxis in Australia in recent years have eaten food purchased, or given to them, when away from home."

Fatal statistics...loss of life

- Nathan Frances, 13 years died from peanut anaphylaxis on school camp in Victoria in 2007;
- Hamidur Rahman, 13 years died from peanut anaphylaxis whilst on school camp in NSW in 2002
- Johnny Whitburn, 15 years died from peanut anaphylaxis whilst on school work experience in NSW in 1999;
- Michelle Bray, 21 years died from crustacea anaphylaxis at a Christmas party in QLD in 2007;
- Kareen Healy, 15 years died from peanut anaphylaxis after eating a salad when visiting a friend after school in NSW in 2002;
- Kylie Lynch, 21 years died from peanut anaphylaxis when eating out with her boyfriend in WA in 2007.

There are several steps to follow when eating away from home if you have a food allergy. First and foremost, **the customer with food allergy needs to always disclose** their food allergy. This includes the many adults who may be at risk of anaphylaxis who have not been properly diagnosed.

Maria Said commented that, " There are many people in the Australian community who will report having severe reactions which include swelling of the mouth, an itchy throat and difficulty breathing and when asked if they have ever seen an allergy specialist, they state they don't really need to because they know that prawns caused it and they just steer clear of them!"

Individuals with food allergy need to be properly diagnosed and educated. It is critical that those deemed at risk of anaphylaxis always carry their Action Plan for Anaphylaxis and their adrenaline auto injector with them. They need to ensure their friends know about their allergy, know what a severe reaction might look like and know how to give the adrenaline auto injector before calling an ambulance for rapid transport to a hospital.

Studies show that reactions in cafés and restaurants are often caused by lack of staff education about food allergy

Food service staff must

- Let the customer make a decision about a menu purchase once they have given them the required information
- Not take short cuts or add one-of ingredients when preparing food
- Take food allergy seriously; small amounts can cause life threatening reactions
- Think about cross contamination when purchasing, storing, preparing and serving food

These few steps along with others can help keep those with life threatening allergies safe, in particular teenagers and young people (13-21 years) who represent nearly 70 percent of food-allergic fatalities¹.

Maria Said, president of Anaphylaxis Australia commented, "Most fatalities are preventable. Education goes a long way to save lives of those at risk. We understand we cannot be guaranteed that a food purchased when eating out is always safe but we do want food service staff to have systems in place so that those with food allergy can make informed decisions on food safety. When they disclose their allergy, they need to be understood and clear information needs to be given so they can make their choice. It's not about a guarantee, it's about us working together to reduce the risk of anaphylaxis in our community. It's a public health issue that is on the rise. We need to be informed to manage it as best we can so that those at risk can lead close to normal lives."

For more information on eating out with food allergy, Food Allergy SMS and our new DL informative fridge magnet for food service facilities visit www.allergyfacts.org.au or call 1300 728 000

Anaphylaxis Australia Inc is a non-profit Australian charity which was formed in 1993. AAI's mission is to increase awareness of anaphylaxis through education, research and support. The organisation works with health and teaching professionals, members of the food industry and all who are touched by life-threatening allergy so that, together, we can improve the quality of life of allergic Australians nationally. For more information visit the AAI website: www.allergyfacts.org.au or call 1300 728 000

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¹ Bock SA, Munoz-Furlong A, Sampson MA. Fatalities due to anaphylactic reactions to foods. *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2001; 107(1):191-3