

# EMPLOYER FUNCTION ALLERGEN CASE STUDY

## Incident summary

Two guests who are allergic to gluten containing cereals were served a dish containing freekeh at a function organised by their employer in October 2016.

There were two organisations involved in serving the meal and all were fully aware of the guests' dietary needs. Both organisations agreed the incorrect meal was supplied to the guests.

The guests lodged a complaint with the NSW Food Authority after one of them suffered a severe allergic reaction.

## Investigation summary

The NSW Food Authority's investigation followed a complaint that during a function two consumers who are allergic to gluten containing cereals, and who had specifically requested a gluten free meal, were served a meal containing gluten. Specifically, a trout dish containing freekeh, a cereal food made from green durum wheat.



The Food Authority investigation found:

- When ordering tickets to the function a specific request for a gluten free meal was made. That request was passed onto the caterer.
- That request was repeated during service of the meal.
- The consumers were supplied with a meal that contained gluten in the form of freekeh. The caterer did not supply two consumers with what they had requested – a gluten free meal.

The caterer breached s 19(1) of the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).

The caterer was fined for this breach and added to the Food Authority Name & Shame register.

The caterer had implemented written procedures in place but it was unclear as to what procedure for serving special diet meals was in place during the function.

There are a number of reasonable steps the caterer could have taken to prevent the breach:

- Clarify the difference between allergies and intolerances
- Establish a written procedure for allergen management, and
- Periodically review staff implementation of the procedure and address any non-compliance.

Since the incident, the caterer has updated its procedure for allergen management



## Food safety implication

- Food service businesses have a responsibility to keep their customers safe by providing accurate information on the allergen status of products, and ensuring best practice food preparation and storage procedures to avoid cross contamination.
- This incident reinforces the potential dangers associated with allergen identification and the need for adequate understanding of the associated risks. Food allergies are very serious and can have life-threatening implications.
- Equally important is the corresponding review and updating of risk-based management controls by the business to prevent a serious anaphylactic reaction.

## What businesses should do

Don't let a consumer's request for allergen free food become lost in a complex supply chain.

Know what your responsibilities regarding allergen management are and meet them.

Check staff compliance with the systems that are in place.

## More information

Be prepared. Be allergy aware  
[http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/be\\_prepared\\_be\\_allergy\\_aware.pdf](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/be_prepared_be_allergy_aware.pdf)

Allergy aware checklist  
[http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/allergy\\_aware\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/allergy_aware_checklist.pdf)

Declaring allergens  
[http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/factsheets/declaring\\_allergens.pdf](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/retail/factsheets/declaring_allergens.pdf)

About the NSW Food Authority: The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled. It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

Note: This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).



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