



Currently applied allergen declaration systems at providers of non-prepacked foods in Switzerland

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Key words

Allergy declaration, allergen labelling system, eating out, food allergy, food intolerance, non-prepacked food, allergen avoidance

Aim of the study

This project aimed to investigate the allergen information practices of food businesses selling non-prepacked foods after the implementation of the new Swiss food law in May 2017.

Materials and methods

A cross sectional telephone survey with food businesses selling non-prepacked foods in Switzerland was conducted. A short, standardised questionnaire with predominantly closed questions was developed in German, based on previous research as well as literature. It was subsequently translated into French and Italian. Altogether 882 food businesses (restaurants, dairies, butcher shops and bakeries) were contacted, of which 387 were willing to take part. SPSS® was used for descriptive statistical analyses.

Results and significance

One of the most relevant results was that only 54/387 (14.0%) of food businesses currently provide written allergen declarations to the customer, either upfront or on demand. The most frequently used labelling system in written allergen declaration was: naming all ingredients (19/54 (35.2%)), followed by naming solely the allergenic ingredients (11/54 (20.4%)), symbols (8/54 (14.8%)), numbers (7/54 (13.0%)), letters (6/54 (11.1%)) and table matrix (3/54 (5.6%)). The vast majority 333/387 (86.0%) use the legal option of providing oral information. A significant number (154/387 (39.8%)) do not place a written sign on how allergen information can be obtained, although this is a requirement in the swiss ordinance to provide information orally. Nearly half (182/387 (47.0%)) of the businesses give information on potential cross-contamination.

Taking also our previous research into consideration, which shows that persons with food allergies and intolerances prefer the written format in which allergenic ingredients are named explicitly, we recommend naming the allergenic ingredient and not using a coding system. This information should be given on demand to promote communication between customer and staff, thus providing an extra measure of verification. In addition, information on cross-contamination should be regulated and the term 'competent person' defined more precisely in the relevant legislation. Finally, awareness of the legal obligations around communicating allergen information as well as the verification of its implementation should be enhanced.

Publications, posters and presentations

Schönberg, S., Jent, S., Stalder, K., Müller, S., & Eisenblätter, J. Praxisleitfaden für die Kennzeichnung von allergenen Zutaten bei unverpackten Lebensmitteln. Personen mit Nahrungsmittelallergien und -intoleranzen gut und sicher verpflegen. Abteilung Ernährung und Diätetik. Berner Fachhochschule.

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