



Analysis of stakeholder needs and requirements regarding the declaration of allergens in non-prepacked foods

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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 develop recommendations on how allergen declarations may be best implemented for non-prepacked foods in a way that is easily understandable for food allergic and intolerant consumers while being practical for providers of unpacked foods.

Materials and methods

Sequential mixed methods were used. As a first step, sixteen remote semi-structured interviews with patient associations and regulatory organisations across eleven European member states were conducted and analysed using a thematic approach. In the second step, face-to-face interviews with ten providers of non-prepacked foods were conducted and analysed. The providers had already implemented labelling systems with written information or written documentation of allergenic ingredients in Switzerland. The first two steps informed the discussion structure for the following step, in which thirteen food allergic consumers and eleven providers of non-prepacked foods discussed their experiences with allergen information and declaration in separate and mixed focus groups. The last step was an online survey to quantify the results of the subsequent steps in a larger sample of 116 food allergic and intolerant consumers that were reached via patient organisations.

Results and significance

One of the most relevant results was that food providers as well as consumers prefer a uniform allergen declaration system. The declaration system listing the allergenic ingredients was rated best by the consumers in the survey, followed by the use of symbols, matrices and letters. The least preferred system used numbers. According to the results of the focus groups, the advantages of using letters compared to numbers included that they are used in gastronomic software, and that consumers are used to them as they are commonly used in other countries. Regardless of the system used, effective communication and a mutual understanding between consumers and food providers were identified as key factors for successful use of allergen information. All results with practical relevance were summarised in a practice guideline for providers of non-prepacked foods. The listed publications show the results of this project in detail.

Publications, posters and presentations

- Eisenblätter, J., Hächler, S., Stalder, K., Müller, S., Schönberg, S., & Jent, S. Allergene in unverpackten Lebensmitteln – welche Informationsvermittlung bevorzugen Betroffene. [in preparation]
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- Prozorovskaia, D., De Zordo, S., Jent, S., Stalder, K., Nafzger, S., Müller, S., Eisenblätter, J. (2017). Allergen declaration in non-prepacked food: The current European state and the unmet needs. Poster: EAACI Conference, 17 - 21 June 2017, Helsinki, Finland
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- Prozorovskaia, D., De Zordo, S., Mueller, S., Schönberg, S., Jent, S., & Eisenblaetter, J. Post EU FIR: A qualitative study on European stakeholders' views on allergen information for non-prepacked foods. [submitted]
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