

ALLERGENS



What is an allergen?

An allergen is a food or food component that causes an allergic reaction in some people's immune system. This means if you are allergic to milk for example, you may react by having stomach cramps or diarrhoea.

Reactions to other allergens can include vomiting, asthma, runny nose, stomach cramps and diarrhoea.

Some allergens such as seafood, gluten and peanuts are not very common, but can cause serious reactions and may mean that people must be admitted to hospital and may even cause death. The following most common allergens must be highlighted on packaging food products, according to the South African Labelling Regulations R.146. As SPAR is serving packaged products and ready-eat-meals, we may not be able to display these allergens and they therefore need to be kept in a supplier ingredients information file in the department for any customer queries.

(R.146, Page 27, regulation 43, 44 & 45):

Allergens

43. Where a product or its packaging material contains any common allergen, its presence shall be indicated, as the case may be:
- (1) (a) in parenthesis after the name of such ingredient in the list of ingredients, if it is not self evident from the name of the ingredient; and/or
 - (b) in close proximity to the ingredient list in a list or block with the words "Contains: (allergen(s))".
 - (2) in the case of significant cereals, the name of the specific significant cereal species shall be specified in the name of the ingredient in the list of ingredients with the word "gluten" indicated in parenthesis.

Uncommon allergens

44. (1) The presence of uncommon allergens in or on the foodstuff or its packaging material has to be disclosed by manufacturers upon request by a consumer, inspector or the Department based on the information contained in the Supplier Ingredient Information File provided in Guideline 6 which shall be kept on record.
- (2) The presence of goat's milk in a foodstuff shall be labelled in the same manner as for common allergens as indicated in regulation 43.

Allergen cross contamination

45. If there is a risk for cross-contamination of a common allergen in a food processing facility:
- (a) due diligence shall be exercised to prevent the occurrence of such contamination and an allergen control policy (ACP) shall be implemented in accordance with the guidelines; and
 - (b) in the case where precautionary labelling is utilised, this shall not be utilised to circumvent the implementation of GMPs and an effective allergen control policy (ACP); and
 - (c) in the case where precautionary labelling is utilised, the risk, the manner of assessing the risk, and the steps taken to avoid the risk of allergen cross-contamination, shall be documented.

Definition of an allergen

(R.146, definitions, page 5):

"allergen" means any substance that causes an allergic or other adverse immune response;

E.g. nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, hospitalisation

What are the common allergens?

(R.146, definitions, page 7)

"common allergen" means egg, cow's milk, crustaceans and molluscs, fish, peanuts, soybeans, tree nuts and any significant cereals, as well as ingredients derived from these foodstuffs that has retained its allergenicity in the final product;

Goats milk should be labelled in the same manner as for common allergens.

What are significant cereals?

(R.146, definitions, page 14 & 15)

"significant cereal" means any one of the following cereals:

- (i) Wheat, meaning any species belonging to the genus *Triticum*, including varieties such as kamut and spelt;
- (ii) Rye, meaning any species belonging to the genus *Secale*;
- (iii) Barley, meaning any species⁷ belonging to the genus *Hordeum*;
- (iv) Oats; or
- (v) Crossbred hybrids of wheat, rye or barley (e.g., triticale, which is a cross between wheat and rye).

What is an uncommon allergen?

(R.146, definitions, page 16)

"uncommon allergen" means any food or non-food allergen not classified as a common allergen;

Allergen related claims

- Gluten-free and naturally gluten free: Do not claim wheat-free or gluten-free unless you can prove through analysis (as indicated in R. 146, Page 28, regulation 46 (1) (a) (iv)) that the product does not contain more than 20mg/kg of gluten.
- Do not claim any product is allergen-free, hypoallergenic or non-allergenic.

Precautionary statements regarding allergens:

A precautionary statement is a warning that the product may contain one/more allergens:

E.g. "This product could contain egg"

E.g. "This product is made in a facility that uses nuts"

Where precautionary labelling is used, it is necessary to prove that you have an allergen control policy in place to prevent cross-contamination from occurring.

Precautionary labelling is not compulsory.

We would suggest that you refrain from using precautionary statements unless you are able to prove that you have an allergen control policy in place.

As per R. 638, Foodstuffs, cosmetics and disinfectants act 1972. Regulation governing general hygiene requirements for food premises, the transport of food and related matters.

The following points must be noted and are applicable to the retail sector:
(R. 638, regulation 5.2, page 12).

A food premises must be of such location, design, construction and finish and must be so equipped and maintained in the condition for which it was intended. that it can be used always for the purpose for which it was designed, constructed and equipped without creating a health hazard and that food -

- (a) can be handled hygienically on the food premises and facilities thereon; and
- (b) can be protected effectively by the best available method against contamination or spoilage by poisonous or offensive gases, vapours, odours, smoke, soot deposits, dust, moisture, insects or other vectors, or by any other physical, chemical (including unintended allergens) or biological contamination or pollution or by any other agent whatsoever.

The following questions can be asked following the extraction from the regulation:

- Have the food premises allocated dedicated storage areas for food ingredient items containing allergens to reduce the risk of unintended allergen contamination towards food ingredients not containing allergens?
- Does the food premises have a documented allergen management programme that addresses control measures to prevent cross contamination of ingredients during storage and handling?
- Has the food premises documented and identified all possible allergens associated with each food ingredient found in storage to determine risk and associated implemented control measures during storage of these ingredients?
- Have the food handlers have been trained appropriately in the allergen management programme, and are valid training records being maintained?

Duties of a food handler:

11. (1) Food, a facility or a container must not be handled by a person -
(viii) after handling a non-pre-packed foodstuff classified as a common allergen where the contamination can result in the cross contamination of other food not associated with common allergens;

(R. 638, regulation 11.1, viii, page 24).

Food handlers are required to understand what an allergen is, identify common allergens and the principles around safe food handling with regards to allergens. This can be assessed by means of verbal and/or visual observation of handling/storage and hand washing procedures being followed by the food handler following contact with a non-prepacked foodstuff classified as a common allergen.

Identifying common allergens:



Egg

Some foods which often contain whole egg or egg components include mayonnaise, meringues, pavlova, baked products, processed meats, some salads, battered and fried foods, egg custard, some sauces and some brands of pasta. Remember that sometimes pies and pastries are glazed with egg.

Label terminology that may indicate the presence of egg protein:

- | | | | |
|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| • Albumin | • Ovalbumin | • Emulsifier | • Ovovitellin |
| • Lysozyme | • Coagulant | • Ovomucoid | • Lecithin |
| • Binder | • Ovomucin | • Globulin | • Vitellin |
| | | | • Livetin |



Cow's Milk

This group includes but is not limited to: milk, cream, butter, cheeses, yoghurt, buttermilk, crème fraiche, condensed milk, ideal milk, milk powder, dairy juices, drinking yoghurt, margarines and chocolate.

Label terminology that may indicate the presence of milk protein:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Artificial butter flavor | • Buttermilk solids | • Natural flavoring | • Sour milk solids |
| • High protein flavor | • Lactose | • Caseinate | • De-lactosed whey |
| • Butter | • Caramel color | • Rennet casein | • Whey or whey powder |
| • Lactalbumin | • Milk derivate | • Cheese | • Dry milk solids |
| • Butter fat | • Caramel flavoring | • Sour cream (or solids) | • Whey protein concentrate |
| • Lactalbumin phosphate | • Casein | • Cream curds | • Milk solids |



Crustaceans, Molluscs and Fish

This includes but is not limited to: prawns, shrimps, lobster, crayfish, oysters, mussels, calamari/squid, tuna, tinned salmon, battered and unbattered hake, fish bites, fish cakes, peppered mackerel caviar, pickled fish, roll mops, crab sticks, smoked salmon, anchovies, anchovy paste (fish paste), fish sauce (for Thai cooking) and sushi.



Peanuts

Peanuts are most often used in cakes, biscuits and muffins and as garnish on donuts and other confectionery. They may also be used in some Asian dishes. Satay sauce commonly contains peanut butter. Some chocolates contain peanuts. Peanut oil contains peanuts.

Tree Nuts

These include brazil nuts, cashew nuts (often used in stir-fries), pecan nuts, almonds, macadamia nuts, walnuts, pistachio nuts, hazelnuts and pine nuts (used in pestos).



Soybeans

Soybeans contain a protein to which some people may be allergic. Soya flour and soya emulsifiers can be found in many products such as processed vegetarian foods, margarines and chocolate chips. Also look for the presence of soya milk and soya sauce (used in stir fries and Asian dishes).

Label terminology that may indicate the presence of soy protein:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Bulking agent | • MSG** | • Thickener |
| • Emulsifier | • Protein | • Tofu |
| • Hydrolysed vegetable protein (HVP) | • Protein extended | • Vegetable broth |
| • Lecithin#* | • Stabiliser | • Vegetable gum |
| • Miso | • Textured vegetable protein (TVP) | • Vegetable starch |

Mostly produced from soy but may be manufactured from egg

** Sometimes produced from soy or wheat but now mostly by synthetic means



Wheat Protein

Wheat is found in any product that contains wheat flour, such as bread, rolls, biscuits, muffins, cakes, pasta, soup powder and any sauce or stew that is thickened with flour.

Label terminology that may indicate the presence of wheat protein:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • All-purpose flour | • Graham flour |
| • Bleached and unbleached flour | • High protein flour |
| • Bulgur (cracked wheat) | • Kamut |
| • Bran | • Malt |
| • Couscous | • Miller's bran |
| • Durum wheat/flour | • Modified food starch or modified starch# |
| • Enriched flour | • Semolina |
| • Farina | • Spelt |
| • Gelatinised starch# (or pre-gelatinised) | • Starch |
| • Gluten or Vital gluten | • Vegetable gum# |
| | • Vegetable starch# |
| | • White flour |

May indicate the presence of soy protein or may be manufactured from cassava (tapioca), maize or rice.



Important! Identify the allergens in your food items. Start by compiling a food ingredient list. Keep this information on file for customer queries.