


Safeguarding Food-Allergic & Food Intolerant Consumers

The importance of improved allergen & gluten labelling in Canada

April 11, 2007





Avoidance is the only defence to prevent allergic or celiac reactions.

The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food for **all** Canadians.

Food labels **must** identify all priority allergens, gluten and sulphites to protect Canadian consumers.



Agenda

- Overview of anaphylaxis
- Overview of celiac disease
- History of labelling policy
- Benefits of passing enhanced allergen labelling amendments
- Call-to-action
- Discussion

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis:

- Is a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction
- Involves several body systems:
 - Skin, upper and lower respiratory, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular
 - Can cause many different symptoms
- May be life-threatening when it affects:
 - **Airway**
 - **Blood circulation**

Signs and Symptoms

- **Face:** itching, redness, swelling of face and tongue
- **Airway:** trouble breathing, swallowing or speaking
- **Stomach:** stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea
- **Total:** hives, rash, itchiness, swelling, weakness, pallor, sense of doom, loss of consciousness

Any of these symptoms may appear.
Without treatment, **anaphylaxis can be fatal.**

Food Allergy: *not just nuts*

Food	Young Children	Adults
Milk	2.5%	0.3%
Egg	1.3%	0.2%
Peanut	0.8%	0.6%
Tree nuts	0.2%	0.5%
Fish	0.1%	0.4%
Shellfish	0.1%	2.0%

H. Sampson, Food Allergy Update, JACI 2004



Food Allergy in Canada

- 1.2 million Canadians at risk (based on US estimate)
- Up to 6% of young children (under 3 yrs)
- Peanut allergy has doubled* in North America in past decade
(*Refers to US data)

Food allergy is a growing public health concern.



Food Allergy: the reality

- No cure on the horizon
- Strict avoidance is key to preventing an allergic reaction:
 - A small amount can trigger a reaction
 - Cannot tell who is at risk for mild, moderate, or fatal reaction
- Accidents happen despite best efforts:
 - Threat of sudden death without proper treatment

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease:

- A genetically based autoimmune disorder caused by “gluten” in wheat, rye and barley
- Can affect several body systems
 - Gastro-intestinal, skin, skeleton, blood, nervous system, reproductive system
- Symptoms can develop at any age
- Acute symptoms sometimes triggered by stress – infection, pregnancy, surgery



Common Symptoms

- Symptoms vary greatly in number and severity:
 - Abdominal pain, bloating
 - Anemia
 - Weight loss
 - Extreme exhaustion
 - Bone and joint pain
 - Mouth ulcers
 - Depression
 - Recurrent miscarriages
 - Infertility in both men and women
 - Short stature in children, etc.



Celiac Disease in Canada

- 150,000 to 300,000 Canadians at risk (based on new US prevalence)
- Diagnosis is increasing:
 - Greater awareness
 - Celiac disease is not just a “childhood disease”



Celiac Disease: the reality

- The only treatment is a strict gluten-free diet – **for life**
- Strict avoidance of gluten reduces risk of serious complications:
 - Osteoporosis
 - Reproductive disorders
 - Lymphoma
 - Possibly other autoimmune diseases



Avoidance is best defence

- Individuals with food allergy must avoid their food triggers
- Celiac disease must avoid their food triggers

We must be able to rely on complete and accurate labels

History

- **1993:** Health Canada begins major revisions of *Food and Drug Regulations*
- **1994:** Scientific review of literature as a basis for priority allergens
- **1999:** *Common Allergenic Foods and Their Labelling in Canada – A Review*, Zarkadas et. al., Canadian Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
- **2000:** Drafted proposed amendments to *Food and Drug Regulations*
- **2004:** Amendments were top priority
- **2007:** *Where do things stand?*



Benefits to Consumers/Families

- Enhanced food labelling will:
 - Save lives and alleviate suffering
 - Reduce inadvertent reactions
 - Improve quality of life
 - Develop confidence in food products
 - Increase array of safe food choices
 - Reduce effects of limited diets



Benefits to Food Industry

- Enhanced food labelling will:
 - Save lives and alleviate suffering
 - Build confidence/brand loyalty:
 - Minimize inquiries and concerns
 - Ensure standards are met by entire food industry
 - Reduce product recalls
 - Take the guess work out of current labelling decisions
 - Allows industry to be globally competitive



Benefits to Government

- Enhanced food labelling will:
 - Save lives and alleviate suffering
 - Reduce healthcare costs
 - Provide Canadian Food Inspection Agency with standard and consistent regulations to follow
 - Reduce recalls
 - Regain confidence of key stakeholders
 - Finalize the priority allergen labelling file
 - Catch up with our global trading partners

Call-to-Action

- Prioritize allergen labelling:
 - Prepare legislation for publication in Gazette I by September 2007
 - Commit resources for resolving comments within 90 day period

Legislate labelling of priority allergens and gluten sources

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