



MANAGING FOOD ALLERGENS AND INTOLERANCES

INSIGHT REPORT



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FOREWORD

At Polaris Elements, we are passionate about empowering the hospitality industry through actionable insights and meaningful solutions. Collaborating with KAM on this vital piece of research has allowed us to explore one of the most pressing challenges facing the industry today – managing food allergens and intolerances. With 1 in 20 people in the UK confirmed to have a food allergy, as highlighted by the Food Standards Agency, the impact on hospitality businesses is significant. It affects day-to-day operations, customer satisfaction, and, ultimately, revenue.



By creating safer, more inclusive environments, businesses can not only protect their customers but also enhance their reputation and drive success.

This whitepaper provides a comprehensive look at both consumer and operator perspectives on food allergies and intolerances. We hope the insights shared here not only guide businesses in improving their practices and compliance but also demonstrate how addressing these issues proactively can present opportunities for growth.

We believe this research will serve as a valuable resource for operators and managers alike, helping to elevate standards and create more positive experiences for everyone involved in the hospitality industry.





EATING OUT OF THE HOME WITH ALLERGIES OR INTOLERANCES

66%

Eat out of the home at least once a week

77%

Tried somewhere new in the last 3 months

50%

Find it easier / less stressful to stick to familiar places

Eating out of the home continues to be a big part of consumers lives, whether purchasing food to eat on the go, or eating in pubs, restaurants, quick service restaurants (QSR) or coffee shops. All of our research respondents had a food allergy or intolerance, and certainly their food sensitivities don't put them off trying new places, however it would seem that once they find somewhere good, then they stick to it – but that can be true for everyone. Therefore, the appetite is the same for these consumers as with all consumers, so venues need to ensure they are catering for everyone.

1 in 5

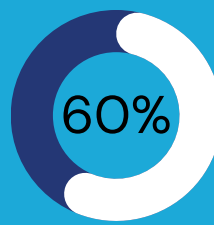
Find it awkward and uncomfortable to have to ask for allergen information

RESEARCHING MENUS AND ALLERGEN INFORMATION BEFORE A VISIT

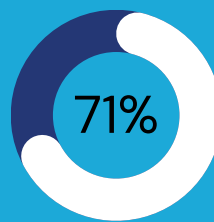
Food allergens and intolerances mean consumers are more likely to do their homework before visiting a venue. Their preferred method of research is the venue website, however only 1-in-3 of operators said allergen information was listed against each dish on their website.

There is a clear disconnect here between what customers want and what operators are currently delivering. A disconnect which has the potential to significantly impact venue choice for those with allergies or intolerances. This shows the need for operators to be open and transparent about their menus, food items and allergen / ingredient information to the public.

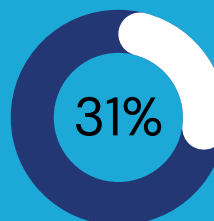
This also represents an opportunity – where an operator could potentially increase their covers and sales by including allergen / ingredient information on their website.



Research before they go either all or most of the time, with only 4% never researching



Use the venue's website, but 40% are unlikely to visit if information is inadequate.



Of operators have allergen info against each dish on their website

VISITING A VENUE

Consumers are largely taking responsibility themselves for finding out allergen information when in a venue, with 2-in-3 looking at the allergen information on menus if eating in, and 1-in-2 reading product and item labels if eating on the go. The majority of customers would rather try and find out the relevant allergen information themselves rather than asking staff. There is an innate reticence amongst consumers to speak to staff in venues, and this is true for all customers (we are British after all!) – so venues should be aware that staff are just one of the tools at their disposal when it comes to allergen information and awareness. Messaging must be clear and easily accessible throughout every customer touchpoint in venue.

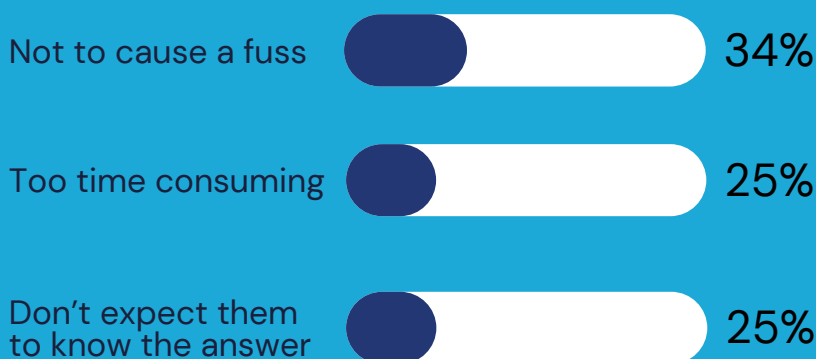
69%

Will look for allergen info on the menu in venue, or if eating on the go 47% will look at product / item labels – and 81% trust this information to be correct

74%

Would rather try and find the relevant allergen info themselves vs asking staff

Top 3 reasons for not speaking to staff regarding allergen information...





RECEIVING ALLERGEN INFORMATION IN A VENUE AND STAFF RESPONSIBILITY

93%

Of operators have formal staff training on allergies and intolerances in place

95%

Of staff say the training they do receive is either very good or good

98%

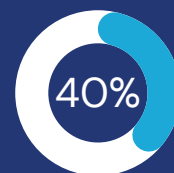
Are confident their staff can appropriately deal with allergen requests from consumers

Consumers need and want to be able to receive allergen information in an easy-to-understand format, or within a conversation with the staff. Their favoured method of receiving this information is via an allergen specific menu. It's vital therefore that any printed / digital information is always kept up-to-date, and the staff training and communication to the front-line staff is at the forefront of any menu, dish or ingredient changes. 4-in-5 operators say that the responsibility is placed on their staff 'to a great extent' to ensure customers are given correct information and nearly all are confident their staff can appropriately deal with allergen requests from consumers. Operators are therefore very reliant on the accuracy of ingredient level information to update written sources and train their team correctly.

Top ways in which customers want to receive allergen information in a venue...



Allergen specific menu



Verbal communication from staff

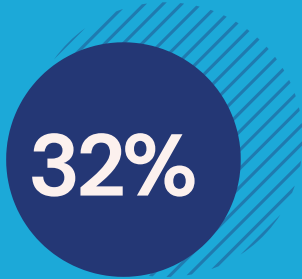


As an ingredient list



As an allergen matrix on a card / booklet / paper

OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN HOSPITALITY EATING-OUT VENUES



Of consumers have had an issue with contaminated food or incorrect information



Of consumers would only ever allow the one mistake, and wouldn't go back



Of operators claim to never have had an allergen incident in their venue

One strike and you're out when it comes to making errors with allergens in venues.

Almost 1 in 3 respondents have had a past experience of being given incorrect information regarding allergens or were served foods that contained items they were allergic to or had an intolerance to. More than half of these consumers would not go back to a venue where this had happened to them, indicating that the trust will have gone. The danger is very real, both in terms of your customers health, but also in terms of the future health of your business. Nearly all of the operators we spoke to said they haven't had any of these experiences, so it may be that customers don't always feedback. No news doesn't always mean good news. Operators must remain constantly vigilant and ensure that the highest standards and maintained at all times. Consistency is key.



UPDATING ALLERGEN INFORMATION

Top ways in which operators currently manage their allergen information updates...



It's clear that from an operator perspective, adhering to food safety regulations, especially around allergens and intolerances, has a time and cost effect on their business. In terms of updating information when an ingredient, dish or menu is changed, nearly three quarters of operators have to make a manual update to their menus, and 2-in-3 updating changes verbally to their staff. There is a time and efficiency issue with these methods, but more importantly a much higher risk of human error. A solution, therefore, that can not only save time, save staff resource, and deliver accuracy would appear critical to ensure that not only are operators meeting the food safety standards required, but that they are also allowing their staff to focus on what matters most – delivering an exceptional experience to their customers.

The main costs of updating allergen information in the eyes of the operators...



KEY TAKEOUTS

“ Consumers want to feel safe when eating out. Operators have a responsibility to ensure they deliver the experience that is demanded. ”

According to a recent (May 2024) report from the Food Standards Agency (FSA), around 2.4 million people in the UK (approx. 6% of the population) have a clinically confirmed food allergy, and 600,000 have Coeliac disease. The number of people who therefore have some of food hypersensitivity is likely to be a lot higher, which means operators must be at the top of their game when providing relevant information, adhering to standards and ensuring staff are well trained to understand the implications of serving customers with allergies and intolerances.

As a parent of a daughter with food allergies – and not just from the standard 14 allergens that must be declared by law – this research study has proved really interesting and thought provoking.

Consumers want to feel safe when eating out, and the research also showed that 43% of operators say they are asked every day for allergen information in their venue. This shows the scale of what consumers and operators are facing every single day, and with a potential future extension of the allergen laws in the UK, this will be an ongoing, although necessary burden to the operator, to keep their customers safe.

Operators have a huge responsibility to meet, and anything they can do to ensure that managing, maintaining and communicating changes to everything from an individual ingredient to a dish to a full menu, would be welcomed.

Jo Lynch, Account Director, KAM.



ABOUT



So much more than just a research agency, KAM is the supportive voice of the UK hospitality industry. We take pride in offering cutting-edge consultancy backed by deep insights. We thrive on providing our clients with valuable and actionable insight solutions that drive real results and purposeful change. If you're ready to be informed, educated, and inspired, hop on board and let's embark on an exciting journey together. Check out our [online Knowledge Hub](#) for access to more Hospitality research and insights.

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Polaris is a specialist hospitality software house with more than 25 years of experience helping businesses grow and succeed. We offer a comprehensive suite of solutions tailored to your business needs, including EPOS, workforce management, labour deployment, menu management, stock management, and procurement. All our products seamlessly integrate, providing a unified platform that gives you more time to focus on what matters most – your staff and customers.

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**Want more advice on how you should be
handling allergens in your venues?**

Download further 'Allergen Advice' here:



The research referenced within this whitepaper is taken from a bespoke research study, specifically conducted by KAM for the purpose of this project. A sample of 253 consumers, who have an allergy or intolerance, were interviewed online, and a sample of 80 hospitality operators were interviewed by phone – all during September 2024.

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