

Food allergies are a growing food safety and public health concern, affecting approximately 4% of the U.S. population—around twelve million Americans—according to the FDA. These allergies result from the immune system's reaction to specific proteins in food. Symptoms can range from mild, such as hives and lip swelling, to severe, life-threatening reactions like anaphylaxis, which may cause respiratory failure and shock.

Operators of food service establishments must understand the gravity of food allergies, including the risk of anaphylaxis and fatal outcomes. They should be familiar with the nine major food allergens, understand food allergen ingredient identities and labeling, and take measures to prevent cross-contact during food preparation and service.

Under Georgia's Food Service Rules and Regulations (Chapter 511-6-1), food service operators and their designated Person in Charge are required to ensure that staff are adequately trained in food safety practices, including food allergy awareness relevant to their roles. Additionally, operators must inform consumers of food allergens present in unpackaged food sold and served at their establishments.

Currently, the list of major food allergens includes **milk, egg, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, wheat, peanuts, soybeans and sesame.**



Photo Source: [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov)

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT MY ESTABLISHMENT?

1. **Disclosure/Notifications:** Consumers with food allergies depend on allergen information that is made available either verbally or written by the food service establishment. Therefore, food service operators shall notify consumers in writing of the presence of major food allergens as ingredients in unpackaged food items that are served or sold to the consumer.

Written Consumer Notification:

- Can be in the form of physical or electronic format.
- While no specific formatting or wording is mandated, the notification must effectively communicate the presence of major allergens in unpackaged food that is served or sold to the consumer. Establishments may choose any method listed below:

- Brochures
- Menu notifications (menu boards, menus, menu screens)
- Label statements
- Table tents
- Placards
- Other effective means (e.g., physical/electronic signage anywhere customers place or pick up a food order to disclose allergen information – near display cases, drive thru menu boards, self-service areas and customer counters.)



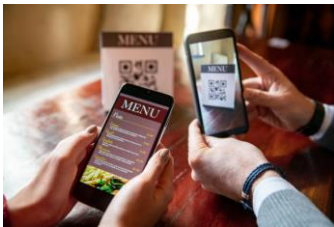
Menu Boards -[photo link](#)



Placards - [photo link](#)



Display case signage - [photo link](#)



Electronic menu -[photo link](#)



Table Tents - [photo link](#)



Brochures - [photo link](#)

An example of a statement listed on a menu, table tent, placard, or display board that informs the consumer of major food allergens present as ingredients may be:
(statements listed below are only examples and should not be misinterpreted to be required by Chapter 511-6-1)

**The following major food allergens are used as ingredients: [list allergen or allergens]. Please notify staff for more information about these ingredients.*

or

** Contains [list allergen or allergens]*

When identifying or declaring allergen ingredients in unpackaged food, food service operators must provide specific details in their written notification statements. *For allergens that fall into broader categories—such as crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, and fish—the specific type must be clearly identified. For example, specify the type of tree nut (e.g., almonds, pecans, walnuts), the species of fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), and the type of crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp).*

2. **Employee Allergen Awareness/Training:** Food service operators and their Person in Charge should develop operational-specific training for food service employees that addresses the major food allergens and the prevention of unintended food allergen exposure to the consumer. Food-allergic consumers often ask employees to share information on ingredients and allergens. Having employees trained on food allergy-related is integral in addressing the needs of having informed employees.

NOTE: *To meet the requirement, Rule .03(2)(n) permits food service operators to create and implement training programs tailored to their specific operations for food employees. It does not mandate that all food employees must pass a test associated with an accredited program.*

A food establishment developing operational-specific allergen training programs for employees may consider incorporating topics including, but not limited to:

- Risks of offering food containing major food allergens;
- Identification of the major food allergens and the hazards they present to sensitive individuals;
- Recognition of symptoms of an allergic reaction and how to respond;
- Food allergen ingredient identification and labeling;
- Principles of allergen cross-contact prevention concerning the major food allergens; and
- Food establishment specific procedures, processes, communication, and controls for allergen management.

Environmental Health Food Section
(404) 657-6534
DPH-Food@dph.ga.gov