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A VITAL Consumer Perspective

“ May contain.....” What does this mean to the allergic consumer?

*Maria Said
Anaphylaxis Australia Inc*

Allergen Bureau 11th September 2008



Developing anaphylaxis awareness through education, research and support



Are you dealing with life-threatening allergies?

The most common triggers of anaphylaxis are: food, insect, medication and latex.

- AWARENESS** "Be allergy aware. Need more information?"
- AVOIDANCE** Avoiding the trigger is the only way to prevent a reaction.
- ACTION** Become familiar with the signs and symptoms of a severe allergic reaction. Front line emergency care for an anaphylactic reaction is an auto injector containing adrenaline.

1300 728 000
www.allergyfacts.org.au

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What does Anaphylaxis Australia do?



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INCREASE AWARENESS

EDUCATE

RESEARCH

SUPPORT

ADVOCATE

AND

WORK WITH health

and teaching professionals,

members of the food industry, government

departments and more

Resource Tools to help manage Severe Allergy

Your own resource library - All these documents are available on this DVD for you to print out when needed.

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FAAA – Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Alliance

www.foodallergyalliance.org



- Alliance goals :
- Prevention of deaths and allergic reactions
 - School and Childcare management
 - Food labelling
 - Research
 - Teen/family
 - Safe Transport
 - Food service establishments



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Food Allergy on the Increase

Major allergy practice in Canberra

- Food allergy increased 12 fold from 11 to 138 infants between 1995-2006
- Anaphylaxis increased 7 fold from 5 to 37 cases in same time period
- Hospital admissions for anaphylaxis have also increased Australia wide; doubling over last 12 year period

(Assoc Professor Raymond Mullins MJA June 2007)

Royal Children's Hospital - Melbourne

2000 - 2001 23 admissions for anaphylaxis

2005 – 2006 71 admissions for anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis presentations to Emergency Dept
1998 –2003

75% of children < 5yrs

47% of cases happened at home

86% of reactions due to food



Food Standards Code in Dec 2002

- **Mandatory labelling of major allergens and their products:** egg, milk, peanut, tree nuts, sesame, soy, fish, crustacea.

Cereals containing gluten - NOT wheat

- Customer has legal right to ask for food content at point of sale i.e in restaurant, café, delicatessen etc

What did the new Food Standards Code mean to the allergic consumer?

- } Increase in precautionary statements
- } Less food choices
- } More risk taking behaviour
- } More consumer level food recalls

Precautionary Allergen Labelling

- Not regulated by the Food Standards Code
- Intent is to relay risk
- Australian Food and Grocery Council Allergen Guide - not regulated
- Some manufacturers put statements on all their products
- Other manufacturers carefully consider their use and restrict when possible

Precautionary Allergen Labelling

- Increasing consumer frustration
- Increasing number of consumers questioning the intent of messages
- Health professionals, parents and at risk individuals, including teenagers, are ignoring 'may contain' messages
- International decrease in consumer level of compliance regarding avoidance of products with precautionary statements

This is a global food safety problem



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Labels in the market place



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- May contain occasional nut
- May contain peanuts (*on bag of peanuts*)
- May contain peanuts, nuts and other allergens not listed on the label
- Carefully baked in a nutty environment
- Allergy Information: Baked in a facility that uses dairy
- May contain vitamins and water

Made using Nut Free Chocolate in a Nut Free Environment.

At _____ we do not process peanuts.
Careful procedures are implemented
in the manufacture of this product but special care should
still be taken by individuals with
serious nut allergies.

Using 'nut free' as a marketing tool but still adding a disclaimer!!

Precautionary Allergen Labelling that would work

- Ingredient list and no 'may contain' warning

or

- 'May contain' labelling that is believable, consistent, easy to read and understand and easy to find on the package





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What we want:



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- Simple clear language terms used in ingredient list
- Major allergens declared
- Criteria for the use of precautionary statements
- Consumer communication so that they understand what a statement may mean
- Manufacturers to communicate ingredient and packaging changes, new products, food recalls etc with consumers
- Consumers to always read ingredient lists and always have emergency kit with them

Allergen Forum: VITAL

Voluntary Incidental Trace Allergen Labelling

-a set of allergen risk assessment tools to assist in determining when and if a voluntary allergen labelling statement is used

For more information on VITAL visit www.allergenbureau.net



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How we got there.....



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- Review of research data from around the world – LOAEL
- Added a safety margin to all amounts
- Where no research, used lowest amounts that elicited allergic reactions in peanut allergic individuals
- Came up with three levels which are dependant on a specific risk assessment:
 - Label as ingredient
 - Use statement “May be present: xxxxxxxxx”
 - no need for precautionary label



How we got there continued

- Decision tree
- Widespread consultation
- Many seminars and workshops explaining the tool and the reasons for its use
- Preliminary communication with consumers
- Waiting for package labels to reflect use of VITAL

Challenges:

- Studies have limitations (allergens, individuals included,
- Some individuals extremely allergic to miniscule amounts
- Individual may eat multiple serves of the one product and for precautionary labelling using the VITAL tool
- Test kits not available for all allergens
- Tracking of who is using VITAL and who is not – not regulated

Challenges pre VITAL i.e. ‘May contain.....’

- Myriad of statements.....anger, frustration
- No criteria for use
- Industry members working independently
- Little consumer confidence
- Risk taking behaviour
- Physician/dietitians - “ ignore statements, used for legal reasons”
- No limit on how many food that ‘May contain..’ can be consumed

Implementation of VITAL

- Education of food industry including suppliers
- In-house education of staff
- Education of auditors
- Working through VITAL decision tree for each and every product
- Changing labels i.e. marketing, art work, print
- Communicating the change

VITAL industry use in 2008

- **Coles** – several products in stores. Working on how to best communicate this with allergic consumers
- **Byron Bay Cookie Company** – QANTAS cookie supplier
- Woolworths
- George Weston Foods
- Unilever
- Nestle
- Peanut Company of Australia
- Mars
- General Mills
- Barter Steggles

Bottom line.....

- Education
- Strict avoidance of the allergen
- Always read ingredient labels
- Always ask questions if unsure
- If still not sure - don't eat
- Forward planning
- Always have emergency action plan and adrenaline auto injector accessible.



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Food allergy is a fact of life



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Education is the key to good management

Want more information on VITAL?

Go to Allergen Bureau - www.allergenbureau.net
For more information on food allergy visit:

- Anaphylaxis Australia Inc www.allergyfacts.org.au
and
- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy –ASCIA www.allergy.org.au

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