

# The Consumer Impact and Perspective

## Food allergen safety.....do we make safe choices or do we weigh up risks?

*Maria Said*

*Anaphylaxis Australia Inc*

*Allergen Bureau April 2009*



# What does Anaphylaxis Australia do?



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## 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](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

INCREASE AWARENESS

EDUCATE

RESEARCH

SUPPORT

ADVOCATE

AND

WORK WITH health

and teaching professionals,

members of the food industry, government

departments and more



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](http://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

## ACT allergy practice

- 18 000+ patients assessed 1995 – 2007
- 10 fold+ increase in:
  - food allergy
  - peanut allergy
  - peanut sensitisation
  - peanut anaphylaxis

*(Assoc Professor Raymond Mullins JACI 2009)*



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## 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



*(Assoc Professor Mimi Tang, Director, Dept of Allergy and Immunology Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne)*

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# Two recent case studies....

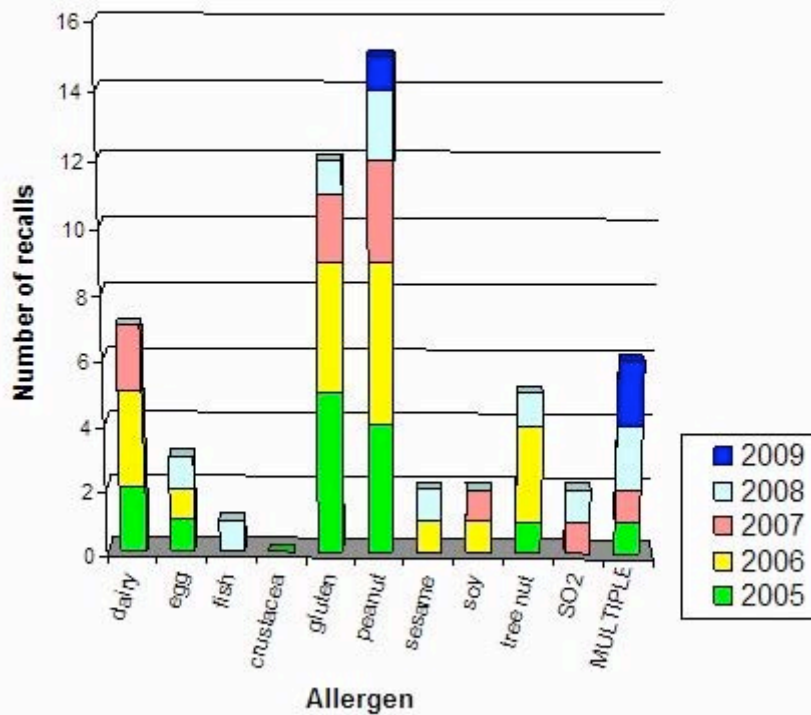
- 1) Non-cow, non-soy milk → 5 year old girl milk and tree nut allergic
- 2) Chocolate egg → 18 month old boy milk anaphylaxis



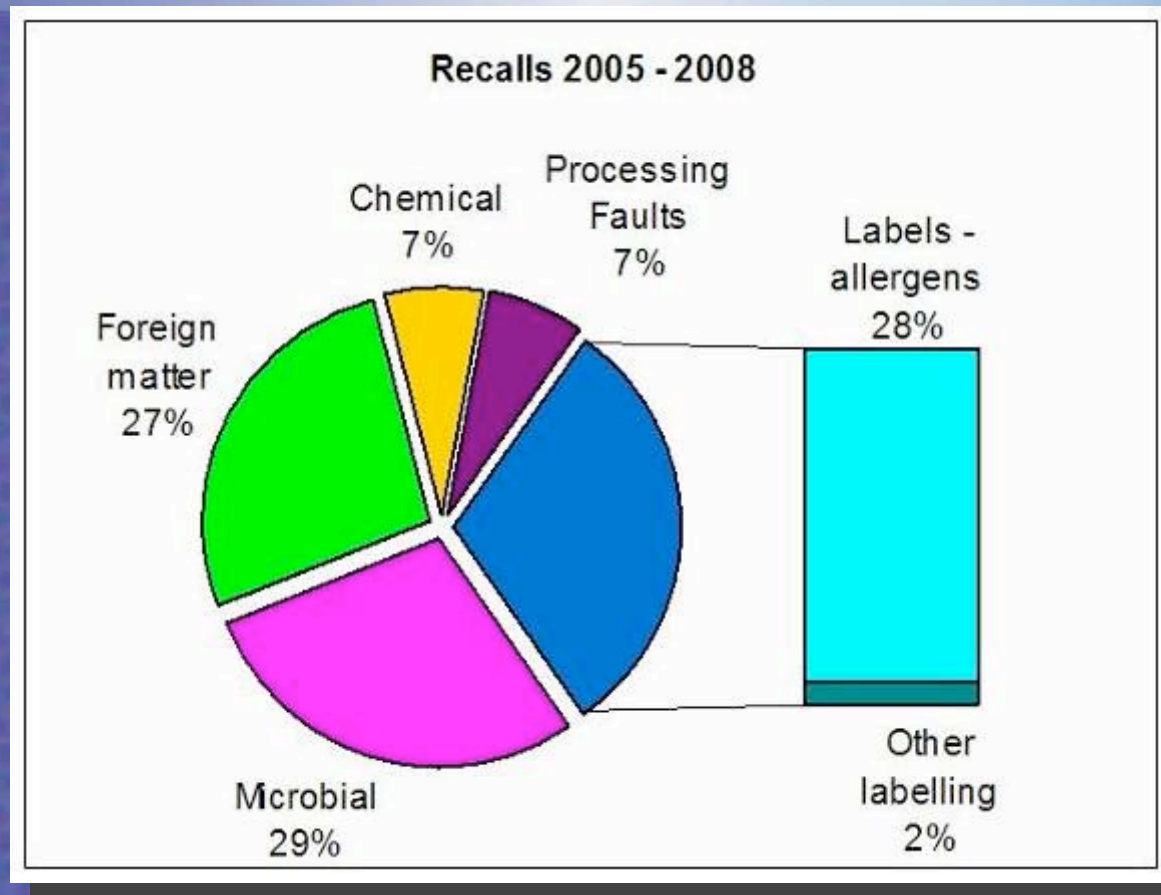
## What did the 2002 Food Standards Code mean to the allergic consumer?

- ✓ Increase in precautionary statements
- ✓ Less food choices
- ✓ More risk taking behaviour
- ✓ More food recalls – undeclared allergens
- ✓ An increase in 'free from' labelling

### Recall frequency by allergen 2005 - 2008

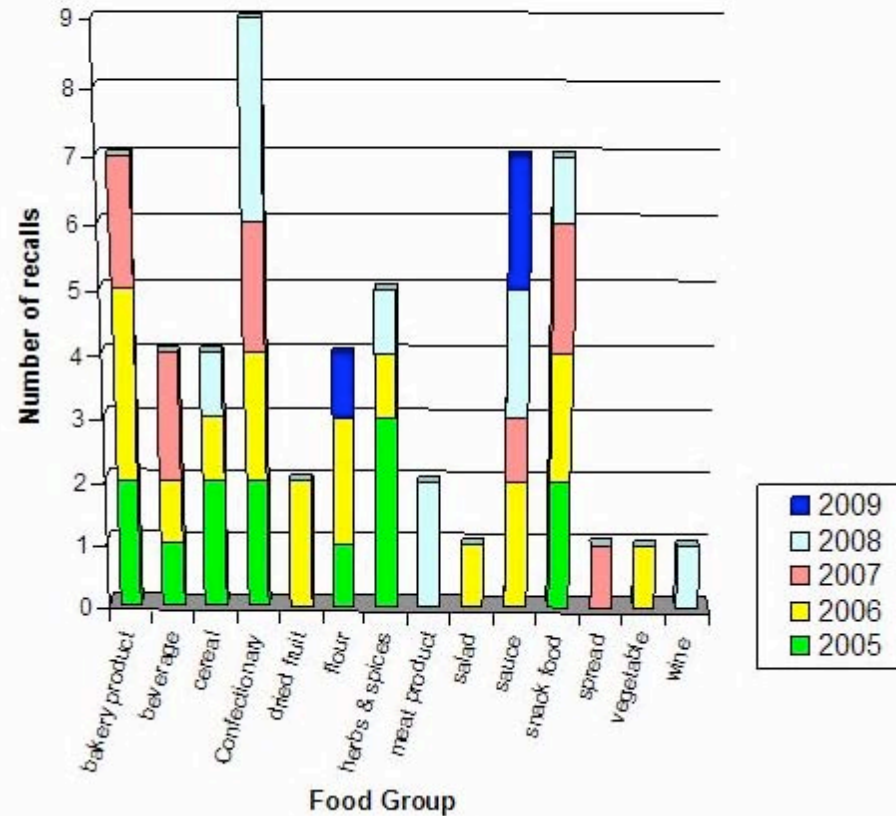


(Courtesy AFGC 2009)



(Courtesy AFGC 2009)

### Product frequency of allergen recall 2005 - 2008



(Courtesy AFGC 2009)



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# 'Free from' labelling



- Can any manufacturer ever guarantee a food is 'free from'?
- Is it OK for manufacturers to use a 'free from' label as a marketing tool aimed at a vulnerable group of consumers?
- How do we teach consumers to read the ingredient list and not just the 'free from' message?
- Should there be a rigorous monitoring system around 'free from' claims?





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# Nut Free



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

- 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



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## Precautionary Allergen Labelling con't



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- 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

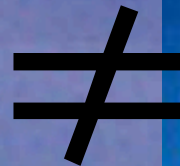


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- May contain occasional nut
- May contain peanuts, nuts and other allergens not listed on the label
- Allergy Information: Baked in a facility that uses dairy
- May contain unknown substances (premix)
- May contain traces of vitamins and water (snack bar)



Coconut milk is gluten free and is therefore suitable for those with cow's milk allergy



## 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 the international Alliance (FAAA) wants:



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- Simple clear language terms
- Major allergens declared
- Criteria for use of precautionary statements
- Consumer communication on statement meanings, ingredient and packaging changes, new products, food recalls etc
- 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 if and when a voluntary allergen labelling statement is used*

For more information on VITAL visit [www.allergenbureau.net](http://www.allergenbureau.net)



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# How we got there.....



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- Researched international data
- No consensus on threshold levels worldwide
- Added a safety margin to all amounts
- 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
- Package labels now starting 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 2009

- Coles
- Byron Bay Cookie Company
- Woolworths
- George Weston Foods
- Unilever
- Nestle
- Peanut Company of Australia
- Mars
- General Mills
- Barter Steggle
- Greens

## 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](http://www.allergenbureau.net)*

For more information on food allergy visit:

- Anaphylaxis Australia Inc

[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

and

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy –ASCIA [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

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