

Food Allergies: Knowledge and Attitudes of Restaurant Managers and Staff

EHS-Net Study Findings and Recommendations

EHS-Net Recommends

In general, managers, food workers, and servers were familiar with food allergies and had positive attitudes about accommodating customers with food allergies. However, we found important gaps.

We recommend restaurants implement three key restaurant practices linked with better food allergy knowledge and more positive attitudes about accommodating customers with food allergies:

- Having a plan for answering questions from customers with food allergies.
- Choosing a specific person in the restaurant to handle food allergy questions and requests.
- Training staff on food allergies.

Why This Study Was Done

Food allergies are a growing food safety issue. One in thirteen children have food allergies, and one in twenty-five adults have food allergies.

Dining out can be difficult for people with food allergies because they must rely on restaurant staff to properly prepare their allergen-free meals. A survey of people with food allergies found that one in three had a reaction in a restaurant.

Understanding manager, food worker, and server knowledge and attitudes about food allergies can help us identify practices to reduce the risk of food allergic reactions in restaurants.

EHS-Net found that managers and staff were generally knowledgeable about food allergies. Nearly all restaurant staff knew the symptoms of an allergic reaction and knew to call 911 in these situations. But more than one in ten managers and staff incorrectly believed that someone with a food allergy could safely eat a small amount of that allergen.



This study was conducted by CDC's Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net). EHS-Net is a federally funded collaboration of federal, state, and local environmental health specialists and epidemiologists working to better understand the environmental causes of foodborne illness. Visit EHS-Net at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNet.

What the Study Described

The purpose of this study was to

- Describe knowledge and attitudes of restaurant managers, food workers, and servers about food allergies.
- Identify factors linked with their knowledge and attitudes.

What the Study Found

Restaurant managers and staff were generally knowledgeable about food allergies and had positive attitudes about accommodating customers with food allergies. However, some staff

- Incorrectly believed that customers with food allergies could safely eat a small amount of the food they are allergic to.
- Thought that their restaurant might not be able to respond to a food allergy emergency.

Several restaurant practices were consistently linked with managers, food workers, and servers having better food allergy knowledge and more positive attitudes about accommodating customers with food allergies.



Having a specific person on duty in the restaurant to handle food allergy questions and requests was associated with	Having a restaurant plan for answering questions from customers with food allergies was associated with	Having managers and staff at this restaurant who received food allergy training was associated with
↑ Manager knowledge	↑ Worker knowledge	+ Manager attitudes
↑ Server knowledge	+ Manager attitudes	+ Server attitudes
+ Manager attitudes	+ Food worker attitudes	
	+ Server attitudes	

Key Terms

Environmental health specialists: public health workers who enforce health and safety standards related to food and other consumer products.

Food allergy: an immune system response that occurs soon after eating a certain food. A reaction can be severe and life threatening.