Partner Update – Leicestershire Trading Standards

The prevalence of food allergies amongst the population is unfortunately increasing and this is an extra responsibility for settings who cater for young children with a diagnosed food allergy. There are 14 legally recognised allergens in the UK which must be highlighted on a food label, this includes milk, cereals containing gluten, sesame and nuts.

When dealing with food allergies, it is important to understand food labels, the law and what it means. Here are some do’s and don’ts

Do

* Always read the whole label, starting with the ingredients list. All ingredients should be given in the ingredients list and if the food contains one of the 14 allergens, it must be highlighted in bold within the ingredients list.
* Check for any ‘may contain’ statements on the label. Sometimes an allergen isn’t an intended ingredient in a food, but traces of the allergen may be present due to the way the food is manufactured as a result of cross contamination. This will be indicated using a ‘may contain’ statement.
* Make sure you have accurate and up to date information about the allergies of children in your care.
* Ensure all of your staff have training on food allergens so that they understand the risks. Free allergen training can be found at <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergy-training-for-food-businesses>
* Keep up to date records about each child and their allergies, and ensure that all staff know where to find it.
* Check foods for changes in ingredients, especially if there has been a change in supplier. Manufacturers can change recipe formulations without notice, resulting in an allergen being present which may not previously have been there.

Don’t

* Rely on information on the front of a food label. For example, a statement that a food is vegan does not always mean that it will be safe to eat if you have a milk or egg allergy. There may still be traces of the allergen present. Always check the ingredients list and any ‘may contain’ statement.
* Buy foods which have unclear labelling or are labelled in a foreign language you don’t understand, even if it is a brand of food you have eaten before. Recipes for foods can be different in different countries and a food meant to be sold in another country may contain different ingredients to the UK version. If you can’t read the label, don’t take the risk. Foods not labelled in English should not be on sale, report it to…….
* Forget to keep foods containing allergens away from the food you will serve to a child with an allergy. Avoiding cross contamination in food preparation areas is important and could save a life. For more information about this see <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/avoiding-cross-contamination>
* Be afraid to refuse to serve food or withdraw it from use if you are not sure, or want to wait until you have made further checks about a child’s allergy.  For some individuals even the smallest amount of an allergen can lead to a very serious reaction requiring emergency care.