

Better food labels could reduce food allergy-related anaphylaxis

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Researchers want food labelling regulations tightened after their study found that some people with allergies had anaphylactic reactions to packaged foods.

The survey of 864 Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia members found that over nine months, 58 (6.7 per cent) reported anaphylactic reactions to a packaged food where the suspected allergen was not a listed ingredient.

Of the 58, five (8.6 per cent) said there was no Precautionary Allergen Label (PAL), 31 (53.5 per cent) said there was a PAL but it didn't specify the suspected trigger food, and 22 (38 per cent) said there was a PAL that did list it. Suspected trigger/s were peanuts (19), other tree nuts (11), cashews (8), milk (9), eggs (5) walnuts (3), sesame seeds (2) and prawns (1).

Symptoms included difficult/noisy breathing, tongue swelling, throat swelling/tightness, difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice, chest tightness and shortness of breath, wheeze or persistent cough, persistent dizziness and/or collapse, pale and floppy as part of a generalised allergic reaction (in young children only).

Published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice*, the study involved the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, Royal Children's Hospital and the University of Sydney.

The results were similar to an earlier study based on Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy health professional reports. That study was published in the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* in January.

Potential allergens [must be declared](#) on Australian food labels when they are present as ingredients or as components of food additives or processing aids. PAL is voluntary and uses statements such as "may contain traces" or "may be present".

Lead researcher and Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

Allergy and Lung Health Unit postdoctoral research fellow Giovanni Zurzolo is concerned that an allergen specific PAL was missing in more than half the [anaphylaxis](#) examples.

Dr. Zurzolo said current industry PAL practice failed to consistently provide safe food choices for those with allergies, who still had to take risks. "There is no reliable labelling system that protects consumers with food [allergy](#) from anaphylaxis," he said.

The study's senior author, MCRI and University of Melbourne Professor Katie Allen, said anaphylaxis was a serious health issue. "This research shows how important accurate food labelling is," she said. "These reactions can be life-threatening."

The study found Government regulation and improved labelling was needed to standardise the PAL system and, in doing so, improve the quality of life for consumers with [food](#) allergies. "As most consumers [who] experience a [reaction](#) do not often report the incident, it is likely this represents an underestimation of true prevalence," the researchers found.

"We believe [government regulation](#) is required to aid in the standardisation of PAL. Further to this, we advise clinicians to caution consumers about the possibility of allergic reactions to packaged foods, in particular high risk foods such as chocolate, ice-cream, sweets/candy and baked products."

More information: Giovanni A. Zurzolo et al. Self-reported anaphylaxis to packaged foods in Australia, *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaip.2018.09.006](#)

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