

Call for greater transparency in gluten-free testing

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A celiac disease expert from the University of Western Australia is

calling for greater transparency in the testing of gluten free foods. It comes after reports that some gluten free products contain traces of gluten, potentially dangerous to sufferers of celiac disease.

UWA Professor Geoff Forbes said recent studies detected gluten in 14 per cent of imported gluten free foods, nine per cent of gluten free marketed restaurant foods and 2.7 per cent of commonly purchased gluten free foods, including foods manufactured in dedicated gluten free factories.

"These findings are a big concern and a reminder of the difficulties faced by celiac disease patients," he said.

In his article reflecting on the [recent reports](#), and published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Professor Forbes said the governance of gluten free food code compliance was unsatisfactory.

"There are several [government agencies](#) with responsibilities for [food safety](#). Despite this, the testing of gluten free foods for food code compliance in the [food industry](#) is without federal or state government oversight, and there is no reporting of test results," he said.

Professor Forbes said the cumulative effect of tiny traces of gluten in different foods could cause major health consequences for celiac disease patients.

"Inadvertent gluten exposure may occur by cross-contamination from known gluten-containing foods, or from foods considered free of gluten by listed ingredient but not labeled gluten free," he said.

"The very least patients should expect is negligible additional contamination from gluten-free labelled products. The testing of gluten free labeled foods to check the levels of gluten is critical."

Professor Forbes said a solution to the problem would be to mandate the regular publication of laboratory test results as a simple measure to assure consumers with celiac disease.

"This would also be a positive initiative for local gluten free food exporters, wishing to take an international advantage of the tighter Australian gluten-free standard."

More information: Geoffrey M Forbes. Gluten in "gluten-free" manufactured foods in Australia: a cross-sectional study, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2019). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50148](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50148)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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