

Sub-optimal food allergy knowledge and attitudes among restaurant staff

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A new study of restaurant staff reveals low levels of food allergy knowledge and negative attitudes about serving people with food allergies, while exploring key factors that might influence such knowledge and attitudes. Adrian Loerbroks of the University of Düsseldorf, Germany, and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on April 24, 2019.

More than 10 percent of people in Europe have food allergies. When eating out, they rely on restaurant staff to provide suitable foods, but previous research points to major gaps in food allergy knowledge among restaurant staff. Moreover, most studies have not adequately addressed staff attitudes toward food allergies, nor which factors might determine food allergy knowledge and food allergy attitudes.

To improve understanding in this area, Loerbroks and colleagues conducted structured, face-to-face interviews with 295 staff members of restaurants in 15 randomly selected districts of Düsseldorf, Germany. They found that just 30 percent of the interviewees could correctly name three common

food allergens, and 41 percent correctly answered five true-or-[false statements](#) about food allergies.

Most of the staff held [positive attitudes](#) regarding their and their colleagues' responsibility to help meet the needs of customers with food allergies. However, the interviewees generally held negative attitudes about serving such customers and had [negative attitudes](#) regarding the accuracy of customers' reports of their own food allergies.

Statistical analyses revealed factors that could influence food allergy knowledge and attitudes. For instance, higher food-allergy knowledge levels were found among managers, staff members with the highest school degree, staff at larger restaurants, and staff at restaurants with more comprehensive customer service. Female staff were more likely to believe customers' self-reports of food allergies. Notably, no links were found between prior food allergy training and food allergy knowledge.

The authors note that additional research is needed to further illuminate key factors that influence food allergy knowledge and attitudes. Systematically identifying these factors could help inform development of educational programs for restaurant staff.

Loerbroks adds: "We found that that food [allergy](#) knowledge was not optimal. For instance, about every third staff member that we interviewed believed that drinking water could dilute [food](#) allergens. This is particularly problematic when [staff](#) calls medical help only with a large delay, because water is served instead."

More information: Loerbroks A, Tolksdorf SJ, Wagenmann M, Smith H (2019) Food allergy knowledge, attitudes and their determinants among restaurant staff: A cross-sectional study. *PLoS ONE* 14(4): e0214625. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214625

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