

Press release: Environment Secretary proposes tougher labelling laws for allergy sufferers

Proposals to overhaul allergen labelling laws and give consumers clearer information on the food they buy have been unveiled by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

Subject to a consultation launched today, food outlets selling pre-packaged food directly for sale could be required to follow new rules designed to give the UK's two million food allergy sufferers greater confidence in the safety of their food.

Under current rules, food prepared on the premise in which it is sold is not required to display allergen information on the package – but the proposed rules could go as far as seeing full ingredients labelling required by law.

The moves follow the tragic death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, the teenager who died after suffering an allergic reaction to a Pret a Manger baguette.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Natasha's parents have suffered a terrible loss, and I want to pay tribute to Nadim and Tanya for their inspirational work to deliver Natasha's law.

We want to ensure that labels are clearer and that the rules for businesses are more consistent – so that allergy sufferers in this country can have confidence in the safety of their food.

Many businesses are already bringing changes on board independently, and in the meantime they should continue doing all they can to give consumers the information they need.

The proposed reforms cover labelling requirements for foods that are packed on the same premises from which they are sold – such as a packaged sandwich or salad made by staff earlier in the day and placed on a shelf for purchase.

Currently, these foods are not required to carry labels, and information on allergens can be given in person by the food business if asked by the consumer.

Food businesses and allergy sufferers are being invited to have their say on four options put forward to improve the way allergy information is provided for these foods, including:

- mandating full ingredient list labelling

- mandating allergen-only labelling on food packaging
- mandating 'ask the staff' labels on all products, with supporting information for consumers available in writing
- promoting best practice around communicating allergen information to consumers

Food Standards Agency Chairman Heather Hancock said:

It's essential for those of us with a food allergy or intolerance to know that we can trust the food we eat. Accurate and reliable labelling is vital, and this consultation is firmly aimed at improving the confidence we have in it.

In recent years choice, trust and availability has really improved for people with food allergy. We want those improvements to continue, so it's important that we hear from everyone affected, as part of this consultation. We're determined to keep on making life better for you.

CEO of [Allergy UK](#), Carla Jones, said:

We welcome this announcement and the commitment shown by the Environment Secretary on this issue. At Allergy UK we believe that whilst those living with allergies must be vigilant on their own behalf, the broader food industry needs to do more than just the bare minimum when it comes to catering for the allergic community. We encourage all those living with allergies to engage with this consultation to ensure their views on this important issue are heard.

The Environment Secretary and Food Minister David Rutley [met allergen groups](#) and retailers late last year to discuss the proposed options around allergen labelling laws.

The Environment Secretary has also met the parents of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse to discuss their campaign for a change in food labelling laws.

A number of food businesses have already begun to implement changes to their provision of allergen information and the [Food Standards Agency](#) will continue to provide food businesses with guidance on allergens. In September the FSA launched Easy to Ask, a campaign to empower young people to ask food businesses about allergens when eating out so they can make safe food choices.

The consultation can be responded to on Defra's [gov.uk page](#).