

# Operator's Edge

The Successful Independent Operator's Resource

## Train Your Staff about Food Allergies

A teenager allergic to sesame had a life-threatening reaction after eating a hamburger bun partially made with sesame flour. When he ordered the sandwich, he made sure the bun had no sesame seeds, but the staff didn't know the ingredients. Later, the teen's mother went to the company Web site, which listed the sesame flour under the ingredients. Fortunately, the boy survived. But his allergic reaction -- and thousands of others -- easily could have been prevented, according to the food allergy research and education group [FARE](#).



FARE, a merger of the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network and Food Allergy Initiative, works with restaurant, healthcare and school professionals to increase food allergy awareness. The group estimates that more than 15 million Americans are allergic to milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish -- the eight most common food allergens.

Here are a few tips to protect guests and train staff:

- \* **Designate an expert.** FARE recommends restaurants designate one person on each shift, usually the manager, to become familiar with food allergies and menu-item ingredients. When a customer mentions a particular food allergy and asks whether a dish contains that ingredient, the server should be trained to say, "I don't know, but let me ask the manager." The manager should point out menu items that contain the specific allergen so the customer can choose another dish. Then the manager personally should tell the kitchen staff about the allergy so they can take steps to avoid cross-contamination.

- \* **Educate.** Click [here](#) to download *Welcoming Guests with Food Allergies*, a comprehensive program for training staff to safely prepare and serve food to guests who have food allergies. The guide is available in English and Spanish. FARE also offers online tips and a poster for restaurants.

- \* **Train kitchen staff:** Chefs and prep cooks need to understand that food for an allergic customer must be prepared separately from all other meals, with different knives, trays and plates, so their food doesn't come in contact with any other food.

- \* **Start a dialogue:** For example, a message at the bottom of your menus can say, "If you have a food allergy, please let us know."

Source: National Restaurant Association