

Food Allergen Awareness FAQs

Comprehensive Requirements for Ensuring Safe Dining in Retail Food Establishments
Updated July 23, 2024

The Massachusetts Food Allergen Awareness requirements, under the Retail Food Code , [105 CMR 590.011 \(C\)](#), were established to enhance food safety in retail food establishments across the state. Launched in 2009, Massachusetts was the first state to mandate comprehensive food allergen awareness training, requiring all food establishments to ensure their staff are knowledgeable about major food allergens and their associated risks and are equipped to handle food allergens safely and effectively. Display of DPH-approved allergen awareness posters, clear labeling on menus advising customers to notify servers of any food allergies, and the inclusion of allergen information on food labels and packaging are key elements of these requirements. Additionally, this requirement mandates training for food establishment staff; each establishment must have a certified food protection manager trained in allergen awareness, with valid certification for a five-year period.

The goal of these requirements is to prevent allergic reactions by fostering a safer dining environment through comprehensive training and awareness of allergens.

Q1: What are the key components of the Massachusetts Food Allergen Awareness Requirements?

A1: Key components include:

- Display of a DPH-approved allergen awareness poster.
- Clear labeling on menus advising customers to notify servers of any food allergies.
- Inclusion of allergen information on food labels.
- Presence of a certified food protection manager trained in allergen awareness.
- Appropriate training of employees according to their assigned duties.
- Adherence to strict cleaning and sanitization protocols to prevent cross-contact with allergens.

Q2: What allergens must be included in the training and labeling?

A2: The training and labeling must include the following nine major food allergens: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and sesame.



Q3: What should be included in the allergen awareness posters?

A3: The allergen awareness posters must be DPH-approved and prominently displayed in the employee work area. They should include a list of nine major food allergens and the relevant safety information (specified below in A5) and be no smaller than 8.5 by 11 inches.

Q4: Can a food establishment display a poster which is different from the example available on the DPH?

A4: Yes, posters different from examples shared by DPH may be used. DPH has developed and will share a food allergen poster rubric to determine if a poster lists all nine major food allergens, the health risks of food allergies, the procedure to follow when a customer states that he/she has a food allergy, and emergency procedures to follow if a customer has an allergic reaction to a food. As posters become available for sharing, examples of different posters will be posted here ([Allergen Awareness Guidance | mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/allergen-awareness-guidance)).

Q5: What specific notice must be included on menus and menu boards?

A5: All printed menus and menu boards must include a clear and conspicuous notice requesting customers to inform the server before placing an order if they have a food allergy. The notice should state: "Before placing your order, please inform your server if a person in your party has a food allergy."

Q6: Are current Massachusetts allergen awareness training certificates that have not expired yet still considered to be valid?

A6: Yes, current training certificates will remain valid for five years from date of issuance.

Q7: How long is the certification for the food protection manager valid?

A7: The certification for the food protection manager is valid for five years and must be renewed as per 105 CMR 590.001(C)(3).

Q8: How does a retail food inspector determine during an inspection if a certificate of completion is valid?

A8: Existing certificates that were issued less than five years ago will remain valid until five years from the date of issuance. New certificates should be considered valid if they reference an allergen awareness training which complies with the American National Standards Institute's National Accreditation Board (ANAB) or the Food Allergy Research & Education's FAREcheck program. As certificates become available for sharing,



examples of valid certificates will be posted here ([Allergen Awareness Guidance | mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/allergen-awareness-guidance)). All current and new certificates of completion will be valid for five years from the date of issuance.

Q9: What establishments or individuals are exempt from the Allergen Awareness requirements?

A9: Food establishments that DO NOT cook, prepare, or serve food intended for immediate consumption are exempt from the allergy awareness requirements.

Public and private schools, educational institutions, summer camps, childcare facilities, and other childcare programs approved to participate in USDA Child Nutrition Programs are exempt, provided that they have written policies and procedures for identifying, documenting, and accommodating students with food allergies. Documentation is also required to verify participation in food allergen training recognized by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. These institutions must also ensure that their employees are properly trained in food allergy awareness as it relates to their assigned duties.

Food service operations in institutional settings where food is prepared and/or served to a specific population (i.e. hospitals, non-profits, Older American Act Elderly Nutrition programs, charitable food facilities) are exempt ONLY from the menu notice requirement. They must still comply with the poster and training requirements.

Temporary food establishments operated by non-profit organizations are exempt from all of the allergen awareness requirements, in accordance with 105 CMR 590.011 (C)(4)(c).

Q10: Are there specific cleaning protocols related to allergens?

A10: In 2022, the US Food and Drug Administration reported that full cleaning (using a wash-rinse-sanitize-air dry method) as recommended in the FDA Food Code was effective at allergen removal and minimizing allergen transfer. The FDA finding and the study it was based on is available here: [Allergen Removal and Transfer Using Wiping and Cleaning Methods in Retail Food Establishments](#).

In 2023, the Conference for Food Protection released guidance to help retail food establishments develop protocols for food allergy prevention and control of the major food allergens. The CFP guidance document is available here: [Major Food Allergen Framework](#).

