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California to require written notification—in restaurant menus—about major food allergens

California has become the first state in the US to require written notification of the nine major food allergens in restaurant menu ingredient descriptions. The Allergen Disclosure for Dining Experiences (ADDE) Act (Senate Bill SB 68), which will go into effect on July 1, 2026, applies to restaurants that have at least one location in California and 20 or more locations nationally.

Only largest CA restaurants affected

When the legislation was proposed, it called for California restaurants of all sizes to be affected. However, changes in the bill were made due to concerns about the potential economic impact on smaller restaurants. Furthermore, *Powers Health* reported that, "The California Restaurant Association said it appreciates that the rule exempts small, independent eateries but warned it could still cause issues for many businesses. The group has also raised concerns about potential "predatory lawsuits" targeting restaurants that make mistakes, according to *The Associated Press*."

FARE's initial opposition then support

Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE), the largest food allergy advocacy organization in the US, originally supported the core intent of the bill but publicly voiced opposition to it, arguing the strict, static menu approach could create a "false sense of security" regarding cross-contact risks. In response, FARE advocated for digital, scalable solutions (like QR codes and customized menu platforms) that would allow restaurants to adapt to frequent ingredient changes. After working with the bill's sponsor on revisions, FARE ultimately backed the amended legislation, praising the progress made toward creating a safer dining environment for the food allergy community while keeping the requirements feasible for restaurateurs.

Display options and enforcement

The top nine allergens recognized by the US Food and Drug Administration are: milk, eggs, fish (such as bass, flounder, cod), crustacean shellfish (such as crab, lobster, shrimp), tree nuts (such as almonds, walnuts, pecans), peanuts, wheat and soybeans.

Allergic Living explained aspects of the new law stating, "the ingredient information can be displayed in the following ways:

- Directly on the menu. A written statement below or adjacent to the menu item will indicate which major allergens it contains.
- Digital format. Restaurants can provide digital labeling, such as a QR code, which links to the food outlet's digital menu.
- Separate allergen menu. If an eatery uses a digital format, it also must "use an alternative method to provide the information to customers who are not able to access the information in the digital format." Options include an allergen-specific menu, chart or booklet.

"The California Department of Public Health and the local health agencies that regulate food and restaurant safety will monitor adherence. The new law also adds

sesame to the list of major food allergens in the California Health and Safety Code."

"A kid can make a big difference"

The impetus for the new law came from Robyn Lao and her 9-year-old daughter Addie Lao, who has multiple food allergies. While their family was dining at a restaurant that provided labeling about the top nine allergens, they decided they wanted allergen menu transparency in all California restaurants.

They found a supporter in California State Senator Caroline Menjivar, who also has food allergies. Together, they worked on the legislation, which was named for Addie and co-sponsored by Menjivar and Robyn Lao. With the law's passage, some 4 million Californians with food allergies can "enjoy the increased peace of mind," Menjivar told *Allergic Living*. "I hope Addie and I can meet up for a meal to see the culmination of our efforts right there in black and white on the menu."

"The ADDE Act is so important so adults and kids like me can eat safely. I learned that even though I'm just a kid, I can make a big difference," said Addie Lao. "[The law] is a crucial first step toward a culture of food allergy safety that will save lives and empower families like ours to dine out," added Robyn Lao.

AAFA's key role in the law's passage

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the oldest and largest non-profit US organization to support patients with allergies and asthma, lobbied hard in support of the bill. The group coordinated letter-writing, social media posts and lobby days in the state's capital. They also obtained support from nearly 70 state and national organizations, more than 500 healthcare professionals and more than 1,000 California residents.

"We want to thank all the advocates who wrote their lawmakers, attended legislative hearings in Sacramento, and organized to make this law a reality," said Melanie Carver, AAFA's chief mission officer. "The result will be felt in thousands of restaurants as people with food allergies enjoy dining out with more confidence to navigate food allergens."

AAFA and other advocates want to expand the scope of the legislation so that it eventually applies to more restaurants in California. The nonprofit also sees the ADDE Act as an example for other states to pass laws about allergen menu disclosure.

Pursuing laws in additional states

AAFA is helping advocate for and, in some cases helping draft, restaurant allergen transparency bills in multiple states. Currently, three states considering bills are Maryland, Michigan and New Jersey. Notably, all the bills would be more stringent than the ADDE Act in California.

Personal experiences are also driving the efforts. "People interested in working on making food allergen labeling a reality in their state should reach out to AAFA's advocacy team to find out how to get involved," said Alexa Jordan, AAFA's manager of policy and advocacy.

New Jersey: Any food service business

A bill proposed for New Jersey would apply to any food service business, including restaurants, delis, coffee shops, convenience stores, grocery stores, food trucks, business cafeterias and movie theaters. Written notification of major food allergens would be required for every menu item. The information would have to be provided on a physical menu, or in a digital format such as a QR code to an online menu. It could also be provided in a written chart or booklet.

For 16-year-old Mishika Jain, multiple allergic reactions due to inaccurate allergen information made family meals at restaurants a source of anxiety. After working for passage of the California law, she recommended menu transparency to her State Senator, Patrick Diegnan, Jr.

"What makes these things resonate is when people tell their personal stories, just like Mishika did for me," said Diegnan, who sponsored the New Jersey bill and whose granddaughter has a peanut allergy.

"Requiring clear allergen disclosure on restaurant menus [would] ensure that more New Jersey residents can enjoy a safe and stress-free dining experience, rather than avoiding dining out," Mishika explained.

Maryland: All restaurants

A Maryland bill would mandate that all restaurants provide written notification about the major allergens contained in menu items. The information can be displayed on menus or in a digital format, such as a QR code that links to an online menu. Other acceptable notifications include a separate allergy menu, chart or booklet.

The bill was introduced by State Delegate Jamila Woods who has food allergies. Coincidentally, State Delegate Linda Foley had introduced a similar bill but merged it with the bill Woods proposed.

"We are particularly appreciative of Skye Cushing, a 17-year-old student in my district, who brought this issue to our attention," Foley explained. Cushing had contacted Foley after "yet another bad experience at a restaurant where misinformation about ingredients caused [her] to have an allergic reaction." Now the teen is collaborating with Foley, Woods and AAFA to advocate for passage of the Maryland bill.

Michigan: Restaurant menu items and unpackaged food

In Michigan, the bill would require restaurants to list major food allergens contained in any menu item. It would also apply to any food service establishments that serve unpackaged food, such as delis or supermarket buffet bars. Ingredient notification can be presented physically or electronically and could include brochures, deli case or menu notifications, placards and more.

The bill was introduced by Michigan State Representative Brenda Carter to amend part of the state's Food Law. "People deserve clear, consistent information before making food choices, she told *Allergic Living*. "My hope is that this bill protects individuals, helps families make informed decisions, and empowers consumers through transparency."

"Setting a powerful precedent"

"[The ADDE Act] sets a powerful precedent," commented Kenneth Mendez, AAFA president and CEO. "That will encourage broader adoption across the [food service] industry and inspire other states to follow California's lead. This is what progress looks like when advocacy, courage, and common sense come together," he said.

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