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## Media Release

### **National Allergy Strategy launches first free national food allergy e-training for hospital staff**

- *Australia has one of the highest incidences of food allergy in the developed world with around one in 10 infants [1], one in 20 children (aged 10-14 years) [2] and one in 50 adults affected [3].*
- *The most recent data shows that food-induced anaphylaxis doubled between 1999 and 2012 [4].*
- *Fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis increase by around 10% each year between 1999 and 2012 [4].*
- *Hospitals have a legal requirement and duty of care to provide safe and suitable food for patients including those with food allergies.*

Today, a free, potentially life-saving online food allergy training course for hospital staff working in kitchens and on wards has been launched by the National Allergy Strategy, a partnership between the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA). This project has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. “*All about Allergens for Hospitals*” is the first nationally standardised training for food allergen management for food service in Australian hospitals.

“The National Allergy Strategy is proud to launch this free training that increases food safety and has the potential to save lives,” says Ms Maria Said, CEO of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy. “People understandably assume that their food allergies are going to be managed well in a hospital environment because they see hospitals as a safe place. Currently, many hospitals do not have adequate practices in place and this is concerning.”

“Until the death of 13-year-old Louis Tate in 2015, only a few hospitals in the whole of Australia had a food allergy policy. Tragically, Louis’ death was preventable and we know that even since losing him there have been other incidents in hospitals that have been near misses. This new training aims to improve the understanding of both food preparation staff and hospital ward staff about the seriousness of food allergy, and to improve food safety, prevent allergic reactions and ultimately save lives,” continued Ms Said.

Louis Tate had a severe anaphylaxis after he ate a spoonful of the breakfast he was served. This was despite the fact that his mother had communicated Louis’ food allergies multiple times. His family want hospitals to have robust policies and processes in place for providing appropriate foods to patients with food allergy.

The “*All about Allergens for Hospitals*” training is aimed at all staff involved in the food service chain in a hospital. This includes kitchen managers, kitchen staff, ward managers, dietitians, nurses and other ward staff. They all play an important role in keeping patients with food allergy safe when they are in hospital. The training provides practical information and there are free downloadable templates and resources available from the Food Allergy Training website.

“Patients with food allergy are more vulnerable when they are in hospital, particularly for unexpected stays. They rely on hospital staff to provide them with safe meals, but unfortunately many people report being served meals containing the foods they are allergic to, despite telling multiple hospital staff about their food allergy,”

says Dr Preeti Joshi, a paediatric clinical immunology/allergy specialist and Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy.

“That is why it is so important that staff providing food in hospitals, like any other food service provider, understand that a patient can have a life-threatening allergic reaction to a tiny amount of the food they are allergic to.”

*Common causes of food-related allergic reactions in hospitals include:*

- Staff not understanding the seriousness of food allergy.
- Information about a patient’s food allergy not being communicated effectively to food preparation staff.
- Not having adequate alerts in place that let hospital staff know that a particular patient has a food allergy.
- Poor food handling and cleaning practices in the kitchen that result in allergens ending up in meals that should not contain them.
- Poor storage and labelling systems in the kitchen resulting in ingredient mix ups and confusion.
- Food preparation staff not following standard recipes or adding or substituting ingredients when they aren’t supposed to.
- Meals for patients with food allergy being mixed up or contaminated with ordinary meals.
- Patients being given a food they are allergic to by mistake.
- Staff being unable to provide accurate information about the ingredients of the meal or guessing about the ingredients and getting it wrong.
- Nursing staff not matching the patient’s name on the wristband to the name on the meal tray before putting the tray in the room.
- Staff not checking if the patient has a food allergy before giving food from the tea trolley or ward pantry.
- Using the same tongs for biscuits/cakes/fruit on tea trolleys.
- Volunteers giving food e.g. Easter chocolate to children

Ms Ingrid Roche, a senior allergy dietitian with many years of experience working in hospital food service, led the National Allergy Strategy working group and has been heavily involved in developing the hospital training.

“We know hospital staff are incredibly busy so we have developed four specific versions of the training relevant to the different staff working in the kitchen and on the ward,” says Ms Roche. “The kitchen versions focus on how to safely prepare meals for patients with food allergy, reading labels on food products, and how to correctly store and handle ingredients. The ward versions focus on documenting patient allergies, identifying patients, communicating their food allergy to the kitchen, and having processes in place that ensure the right meal, fluid or snack goes to the right patient.”

The National Allergy Strategy is also commencing a food allergy awareness campaign through social media, aimed at communicating the shared responsibility when it comes to food allergen management in food service generally.

“What we want to do is encourage a sense of shared responsibility between people with food allergies, the community, health professionals and food service providers when it comes to preventing food-related allergic reactions in hospital or any environment where food is served,” finished Ms Said.

The “*All about Allergens for Hospitals*” training is the next addition to existing courses developed by the National Allergy Strategy for people working in food service:

- The first “*All about Allergens*” course for food service industry workers was launched in July 2017 and has been completed by 18,460\* participants.
- The “*All about Allergens Next Step*” courses for cooks and chefs working in general food service and camps was launched in July 2019 and has been completed by 2,200\* (general food service) and 521\* (camp food service) participants.

\*figures as at 31 July 2020

All of these courses are available via the Food Allergy Training website:

[www.foodallergytraining.org.au](http://www.foodallergytraining.org.au). The new “*All about Allergens for Hospitals*” training will be publicly available on September 24.

- ENDS -

*Distributed by Lanham Media on behalf of National Allergy Strategy*

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#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

“*All about Allergens for Hospitals*” training will not be publicly available until September 24. Access for media can be arranged the day prior on request. Certain elements of the training may be available for viewing earlier if required.

#### **Spokespeople available for interview include:**

- Ms Maria Said, CEO of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy.
- Dr Preeti Joshi, a paediatric clinical immunology/allergy specialist and Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy.
- Ms Ingrid Roche, a senior dietitian working in allergy with many years of experience working in hospital food service. Ms Roche led the National Allergy Strategy working group and has been heavily involved in developing the hospital training. Ms Roche also works at Perth Children’s Hospital.

We have people from the following areas willing to share their stories:

- **Blackman’s Bay, TAS** – the mother of a young girl (5 years) who had to attend hospital for a tonsillectomy a couple of years ago. Despite strongly communicating her daughter’s allergies to nuts (anaphylaxis), dairy (extreme vomiting) and egg, and being assured she would be served safe meals, they had a very scary and disappointing experience, including being served allergens and not being able to identify the ingredients in the food that was served.
- **Brookfield, QLD** – the mother of a young girl (6 years) who was medically evacuated a couple of years ago due to croup. Despite having egg allergy, she was served boiled egg in hospital and food where the ingredients could not be properly identified.

**Media Assets** Photos available [here](#)

B-roll footage will also be available soon, which includes:

- meals for patients with food allergy being prepared and plated in a hospital kitchen
- patient receiving a meal on the ward
- kitchen supervisor looking at the online course website on a computer screen

Link to Parliamentary inquiry report:

[“Walking the allergy tightrope” -May 2020](#)

Parliamentary Inquiry into allergies and anaphylaxis

## About the National Allergy Strategy

The National Allergy Strategy aims to improve the health and quality of life of Australians with allergic diseases and minimise the burden of allergic diseases on individuals, carers, healthcare services and the community.

The National Allergy Strategy is a partnership between the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, the leading medical and patient organisations for allergy in Australia. For more information about the National Allergy Strategy go to: [www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au](http://www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au)

- ASCIA: [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)
- Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia: [www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

## Background Information

- Food allergy induced anaphylaxis has doubled in the last 10 years [4].
- One in 10 infants now have a food allergy [1] and 1 in 20 children aged 10-14 years of age have a food allergy [2] and 2-4% of adults [3].
- Hospital admissions for anaphylaxis have increased 5-fold in the last 20 years [4].
- Deaths from anaphylaxis in Australia have increased by 7% per year (1997-2013) [4].
- Those at risk of anaphylaxis live with the very real daily fear of a life-threatening severe allergic reaction. Individuals at risk of food allergy induced anaphylaxis and their carers have higher than average rates of anxiety [5-7].
- Fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis increase by around 10% each year [4].

## References

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