



## Serving Guests with Allergies

### Generally

Allergies and special diets are becoming more and more common. In all of our locations we must manage these issues, but especially in the schools. Regardless of whether certain items are banned (for example nuts) or they are offered and managed, we take seriously our responsibility to help teach young people with potentially life threatening conditions how to navigate and dine safely. This takes shape in a variety of ways depending on what suits our client best. Our menus and line signage flag common allergens. Communication methods beyond that vary by location. We have two Registered Dietitians within the company, who are available to work with school personnel (nurse) or with students to make sure they can find their way around our menus and trust our approach.

### Dining Staff Allergy Awareness

We have the following in place at each of our locations:

- Managers are ServSafe Certified and anyone who handles food is Food Handler Certified. This certification means they understand the risk of allergies, common allergens, and how to manage guests who have allergies. We extend this training through company trainings (see below image).
- Potential cross-contamination and how to prevent it is a key component of this education. Highlights of how we prevent cross-contamination:
  - Use separate equipment when handling different types of food. Colored cutting boards and utensil handles tell the food handler which equipment to use with each food item. An example is using red for raw meat and green for vegetables.
  - Prep different food groups at different times when using the same prep table.
  - Prep breads in a separate area all-together.
  - Clean and sanitize work surfaces and utensils after each task.
  - Front of the house:
    - Label foods
    - Monitor customer use of tongs – rigorously replace tongs during service
    - Reinforce using a clean plate each time a customer returns for seconds
- Back of the house signage reinforces awareness and the importance of this topic
- Daily line-ups specifically include menu communication and highlight potential allergens. This means staff are knowledgeable and may guide students with allergies.
- All staff know who to refer questions to if they are not 100% confident in the answer. We would rather double check than make any assumptions.

## **Allergy Training, Specifically**

As allergies beyond the common 8 have become more prevalent, a number of states (including Maryland) have required that culinary staff complete an accredited Allergy Training Program.

We have used AllerTrain (food allergy and gluten-free training presented by MenuTrinfo) to provide this service. The course takes approximately 90 minutes and includes a test. They describe it best:

*This training covers the essential information about how to safely interact and serve diners with special dietary needs such as food allergies, intolerances, sensitivities, and Celiac disease. Upon completion of the training, learners understand the most important practices related to allergen control in the front of the house, the back of the house, and in an emergency situation. Each participant will be issued an AllerTrain Lite Certificate of Achievement that is the only one of its type with ANSI accreditation and is valid for 5 years.*

## **Serving Guests with Severe Allergies**

We have found there is no single solution that works for every situation. We take an individual approach to understanding what severe allergies are present within each account. Then (usually with a team including our dietitian, corporate chef, and school nurse) we study the menus, serving patterns / methods, and equipment so we may safely make accommodations while also maintaining a program that works for the population at large.

In nearly all cases we've been able to make accommodations. In rare cases, in partnership with the school, leadership has concluded accommodations would either undermine the goals of the dining program – or – the allergies are too severe to allow for any risk. But, barring that rare exception, we've been able to find a way even when difficult.

## **Celiac Disease**

Our goal is to provide the best dining experience possible for all of our guests, including those with special requests, diets, and allergy restrictions.

One of our key signature practices is we prepare nearly all foods from scratch. Another is we strive to use all edible, wholesome food on hand before it spoils so as little as possible ends up in the trash. To achieve both, we make substitutions in our menus and recipe ingredients which are often subtle, but important when we are serving guests with allergies.

Each of our locations have bread and baking ingredients, as well as other dishes, that contain gluten; and kitchens require staff to share equipment and work spaces. With these conditions in mind, we are not able to characterize any MG operation, as a whole, as “gluten free” or assure a 100% gluten free dining experience. We make every effort to educate staff about allergens, to use recipes and to know the ingredients in the items we serve, but we can not eliminate the possibility of airborne contamination and equipment contamination, especially in the case of Celiac. Beyond our scope of control, and perhaps of more risk to guests with Celiac, is the nature of buffet service where cross contact from serving utensils and accidental mixture of ingredients may occur as people serve themselves.

What we can offer:

- A list of ingredients for foods we serve
- Individually wrapped items we've sourced from a certified gluten free facility
- A dining room advocate who will be responsible for answering questions, checking ingredients and reasonably monitoring preparation

While we hope these efforts would allow a Celiac guest to enjoy dining with us, ultimately it's a decision for the individual after considering the margin of risk that cannot be eliminated by dining and school personnel. We have successfully served Celiac guests in the past, including in the boarding school setting, and look forward to continuing to do so in the future.