Knowsley Council School Meals Service Allergen Policy

Executive Summary

This policy covers the approach that the Council's School Meals Service takes to reducing the risk to pupils and staff with food allergies, intolerances, coeliac disease and wider food hypersensitivities.

Through this policy, we will aim to minimise the risk of allergens causing harm through safe procedures, staff training and planning for effective responses to allergenic emergencies.

Background

The UK's food allergen requirements introduced in 2014 stem from the EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011, which came into force on 13 December 2014 and was adopted into UK law. These standards require food businesses such as the School Meals Service to clearly identify the presence of any of the 14 specified allergens—celery, cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs, mustard, nuts, peanuts, sesame seeds, soybeans, and sulphur dioxide/sulphites—whenever they are used as ingredients.

In 2019 the legislation was amended to reflect additional elements for labelling pre-packed for direct sales (PPDS) which was enacted in 2021 and was broadly referenced as Natashas Law. This placed a legal requirement for businesses to provide full ingredient labelling, with allergens highlighted on all pre-packed for direct sale food.

All secondary schools in which Knowsley Council operate a school meals service will follow Natasha's Law by providing allergy labelling, along with a full ingredient list, on all food provided on site that is PPDS such as sandwiches or salads. Primary Schools in Knowsley operated by the Knowsley Council School Meals Service do not use PPDS products.

Whilst it doesn't affect any food legislation, the enactment of Benedicts Law as part of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2026) specifically places an additional onus on the Education Sector and focuses on allergy management and safety in schools, rather than food information provided to consumers.

This Policy is designed to outline the Knowsley Council's School Meals Service approach to managing allergens.

The 14 food allergens

There are 14 allergens as contained within the law:



All schools who utilise the Knowsley Council School Meals Service will be provided with menus that identify and declare if any of these ingredients are used in any of the products being used / made within the kitchen. Knowsley Council school meals service is committed to ensuring all ingredients for every menu item are accurately listed with any of the 14 allergens shown above being highlighted.

The School Meals Service will ensure that any food served is correctly labelled, highlighting the presence of the 14 food allergens.

Food hypersensitivity is a blanket term for an adverse reaction to food. This could be due to a food allergy, food intolerance or an autoimmune disease such as coeliac disease. The School Meals Service takes into account all ingredients used in a food item, including hidden allergens:

- **Celery** refers to the stalks, leaves and seeds of both celery and celeriac, including celery salt
- **Cereals containing Gluten** include bread, pasta, pastry, cakes, royal icing, sauces, soups and batter
- **Crustaceans** include lobster, prawns, crab, scampi and pastes made with these
- **Eggs** can be found in pasta, quiche, sauces, cakes, mousses and mayonnaise, or items may be brushed with egg glaze
- **Fish** can be found in salad dressings, on pizza and in Worcestershire sauce

- **Lupin flour and seeds** are used in some pastries and bread and often in products labelled as gluten free

- **Molluscs** include squid, snails, mussels and oysters, including oyster sauce

- **Milk** can be found in cheese, butter, cream and yoghurt. Items may also be brushed with a milk glaze or contain milk powder

- **Mustard** refers to seeds, powder and liquid mustard and is often found in dressings and marinades, sauces, curries and soups. Cress also contains the substance which causes a reaction to mustard

- **Nuts,** such as almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, pecans, pistachios and cashews, macadamia and walnuts, are commonly used in desserts, bread, ice cream and sauce, whether whole, ground or as an oil

- **Peanuts** including peanut flour (groundnuts) and groundnut oil, can be found in desserts, cakes and sauces

- **Sesame seeds** are often found in bread, hummus, tahini and stir-fried dishes

- **Soya** refers to soya protein, flour and beans and can be found in tofu, sauces, edamame beans, desserts and may vegetarian and vegan products

- **Sulphur dioxide and sulphites** are preservatives commonly found in dried fruit, fruit juice, meat product, wine and beer (concentrations of more than 10mg/kg or 10mg/litre)

Any changes to suppliers or to a product or ingredient that is delivered to a school kitchen **MUST** be checked against latest allergen information on Cypad which is supplied via Erudus (a web-based product allergen portal). Any changes must be reported to the Catering Development Officer at the earliest convenience but no later than the end of the working day.

Once completed and published, menus **cannot** be changed by anyone except the Catering Development Officer who will update allergen information. Any new products must receive the same checks and sharing of information

Knowsley Council will be responsible for ensuring all documentation regarding ingredients, allergies and staff information are accurate and updated.

Parents / carers must provide the school with accurate and up-to-date information regarding food allergies when the pupil joins the school and throughout the time they

attend. The School Meals Service will provide the school with the Services' Special Diets Procedure form that is completed by the parent / carer and returned to the school. A meeting can be arranged with the School Meals Service; the school and the parent / carer if needed.

The Chef Supervisor is responsible for ensuring all procedures are adhered to while in the kitchen including checking allergens on menus and informing their Contract Manager if they, or any kitchen staff, require additional training.

All kitchen staff will undergo regular training on safe food handling including allergen awareness.

All new staff, including casual staff working in the kitchens, will complete the Food Standards Agency Allergy Awareness training online.

All staff, regardless of their position, are responsible for keeping pupils who have an allergy safe. Everyone must understand the procedures in place to protect them and follow all the guidelines carefully.

The above measures will ensure adherence to the statutory guidance set out under Benedicts Law which comes into effect in all schools across England from September 2026. The core life-saving principles of this law include:

- Clear, whole-school allergy policies
- Comprehensive allergy and anaphylaxis training for school staff. Kitchen staff will have allergen training only
- Access to spare emergency epi-pens
- Individual care plans and allergy action plans for pupils with food allergies