

Claims about gluten in food: a guide for caterers



The rules on making claims about gluten in food are changing on the 1 January 2012 and you may no longer be able to call your food 'gluten-free'.

It's important that you train your staff who work with food so they understand the new descriptions and exactly what they mean. Your staff can then explain to customers what the foods contain and how they are made.

What is gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in cereals such as wheat, rye, barley, and can contaminate some oat products. People with gluten intolerance (coeliac disease) need to avoid all food containing gluten.

Gluten can be present in food knowingly as an ingredient or accidentally by coming into contact with gluten-containing ingredients, such as wheat flour or breadcrumbs, used in the same premises.

You may choose to offer foods for people with gluten intolerance. Many people avoiding gluten will become regular customers of establishments where they are confident their food has been prepared by people who understand their needs and the food will not make them unwell.

What claims can I make? - The rules

The new rules mean there are two claims allowed to describe foods suitable for people with a gluten intolerance. These claims apply to both food where gluten is knowingly an ingredient or present accidently from cross-contamination:

- 1. 'gluten-free': for foods that contain no more than 20 parts of gluten in a million (ppm). These can be foods that:
 - are specially made for someone with gluten intolerance, by using an ingredient that has been treated to reduce its gluten content (such as bread made with gluten-reduced flour)
 - and/or have a gluten-containing ingredient substituted with one that does not contain gluten (such as pasta made from rice instead of wheat)
 - are everyday foods that meet the gluten limit even though they are not specifically made for this purpose (such as a soup made only from vegetables).
- 2. 'very low gluten': only for foods that are specifically prepared for people with a gluten intolerance. They must contain no more than 100 parts of gluten in a million and contain an ingredient that has been specially processed to reduce its gluten content. They may also contain substitute ingredients.

What other information can I provide?

If food does not comply with these new rules, it cannot be described as 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten'. But businesses could make a factual statement such as 'no gluten-containing ingredients', to let customers know that the food doesn't contain any of these ingredients.

If businesses do use these factual statements it is important that they take appropriate steps to manage cross-contamination from gluten-containing foods. Businesses need to be clear that they are not suggesting the food is suitable for someone with coeliac disease. This extra information will allow customers to understand the level of risk and make a decision about whether to buy the food.

How to make a claim about gluten in food Here is a handy chart to help you Do you monitor the level of gluten in your food? YES NO Does the food contain Are you buying in pre-prepared foods labelled as 'qluten-free' or 20ppm of gluten or less? 'very low gluten'? **YES** NO NO Use the claim Does the food **YES** If no ingredients containing 'gluten-free'.* contain an Other than heating, will gluten have been used in the ingredient that has you be changing this final dish and you have tried to been treated to product before serving? minimise the risk of crossreduce the level of contamination with such gluten in it? ingredients, you may wish to use a factual statement to explain this to your customer using the words 'no gluten-containing ingredients'. You cannot say that YES NO it is completely free of gluten or Does the food You cannot make say it is suitable for someone contain 100ppm of any claims about with coeliac disease. gluten or less? suitability for people avoiding gluten. YES NO The claims you can make Use the claim depend on the other 'qluten-free' or 'very **YES** NO ingredients that make up low gluten' but you Use the claim You cannot make the final dish. need to avoid crossany claims about 'very low gluten'.* Go back to the start of the contamination with suitability for people flowchart asking the same gluten-containing avoiding gluten. questions about the final foods when serving. food.

Where can you get more information?

A full copy of the rules can be found in Commission Regulation EC No. 41/2009 (S.I. 2010 No. 2281**) concerning the composition and labelling of foodstuffs suitable for people intolerant to gluten. Guidance on what it means for your business, can be found on the Food Standards Agency's website at: food.gov.uk/safereating/allergyintol/gluten/

More information on controlling cross-contamination can be found in Safer food, better business**, or from your environmental health officer.

^{* &#}x27;Very low gluten' foods and 'gluten free' foods that you have specifically made for people with a gluten intolerance, for example using a special replacement ingredient or a gluten-reduced ingredient, will need to be notified to the relevant authority (please see guidance at food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/publication/guidancelabellinggluten2010.pdf or contact your environmental health officer.)

^{**} or equivalent in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland