



PRESS RELEASE

“May Contain/Contains – Food Allergen Labelling” – Better labelling in the EU is necessary to empower people with food allergy in Europe

Brussels, the 4th of October 2012 | For patients that risk severe anaphylactic reactions from food, even the simplest actions in daily life, such as eating at a restaurant or purchasing food sold in a marketplace can be life-threatening as 7 out of 10 severe reactions happen when eating out.ⁱ The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) organised in collaboration with the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) an event at the European Parliament in Brussels on “May Contain/Contains – Food Allergen Labelling” to share best practices on the precautionary labelling of allergens and the soon compulsory information on allergens in non pre-packed food (restaurants, catering services, wholesalers, etc.). The event was hosted by the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Mrs. Renate Sommer, the rapporteur at the European Parliament of the new European Union (EU) Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers. It attracted more than 80 high-end researchers, policy-makers, including the representatives of 14 EU Member States, representatives of patients' organisations and other interested stakeholders.

The adoption of the new EU regulation in October 2011 was welcomed by EFA as a positive step to empower and protect the health of people with food allergy. Clear and more understandable food information, as intended by the regulation, helps consumers make better informed choices and safer use of food, which is crucial for people with allergies, intolerances and/or special dietary requirements. “Food information is a question of preserving health. Every European citizen has the right to know if a food product can endanger his/her life in one way or another” declared Mrs. Breda Flood, EFA President. “Therefore, we have insisted on the new provision to highlight allergens in the ingredients list allowing consumers to recognise potential allergens at first glance,” explained Mrs. Renate Sommer. According to Prof Cezmi Akdis, EAACI President, “the impact of food allergy on life of the around 17 million affected patients in Europe is often underestimated and dramatically increasing for children.” Over the past ten years, the number of allergic children younger than 5 years has grown considerably and the emergency room visits for anaphylactic reactions have increased seven-fold.ⁱⁱ “Therefore, EAACI is currently running the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis campaign. Unfortunately research funds in the area have not been increased to satisfy so many unmet needs”, he added. “Given that eating habits are changing and more and more people eat out, it is much more difficult for people suffering from allergies to control what is in the products. The extension of mandatory allergen labelling to non pre-packed food therefore is a vital step to protect these consumers,” claimed Mrs. Renate Sommer.

During the event several best practices from EU Member States and projects developed by EFA's members were discussed. The Voluntary Best Practice Guidance on the provision of allergen

information for non pre-packed foods was presented by the UK Food Standards Agency. The Swedish Food Sector Guidelines on the precautionary labelling were showcased by the Swedish Food Federation. EFA's member Swedish Asthma and Allergy Association presented the patients' perspective and introduced their project "Great, an Allergic Customer!" for restaurants and catering.

The new regulation needs to be transposed into national legislation by Member States by 2014 and the Commission is empowered to adopt implementing and delegated acts to facilitate its implementation. EFA highlights the necessity to take food allergy patients' views into consideration in this process and proposes the following action plan for Europe:

- The legibility of the label should be improved with clearer provisions on the contrast between the name of the allergen and the background;
- For non pre-packed food mandatory information on allergen should preferably be in a written form wherever the product is sold;
- Voluntary measures adopted by Member States should address the issues of the provision of the complete and accurate ingredients list and mentioning clearly allergen changes in the labelling;
- European guidance is needed on the use of precautionary "may contain" labeling, which could learn from the best practice in use in Switzerland. In the long term, precautionary labelling should be abolished;
- European guidelines on the training of personnel in the food sector concerning the food allergen management as part of hygiene/safety manuals should be drafted.

As Djoeke Kunnen, a patient with severe food allergy, stated during the event: "Food should be safe, but also tasty and fun experience."

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The **European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)** is a non-profit network of allergy, asthma and COPD patients organisations, representing 35 national associations in 22 countries and over 400,000 patients. EFA is dedicated to making Europe a place where people with allergies, asthma and COPD have the right to best quality of care and safe environment, live uncompromised lives and are actively involved in all decisions influencing their health. www.efanet.org

The **European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI)** is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. It includes over 7,400 members from 121 countries, as well as 42 National Allergy Societies. www.eaaci.org

ⁱ European Commission Citizen's Summary, *Helping citizens make healthier dietary choices*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/publications/labelling_citizens_summary_310108_final_cab.pdf (consulted on 18 September 2012).

ⁱⁱ EAACI Press Release, *17 million Europeans allergic to food; allergies in children doubled in the last 10 years*, available at: http://www.eaaci.net/images/files/Pdf_MsWord/2011/Press_Release/17%20million%20Europeans%20allergic%20to%20food;%20allergies%20in%20children%20doubled%20in%20the%20last%2010%20years.pdf (consulted on 18 September 2012).