

FOOD ALLERGY: a burden carried by more than 17 million of Europeans

- **In Europe, 1 out of every 20 children has one or more food allergies**
- **In the last decade, the cases of food allergies have doubled and the number of hospitalisations caused by severe allergic reactions has increased 7-fold**
- **More awareness and education is needed to improve management of food allergies and anaphylaxis**

With more than 17 million of Europeans suffering from allergies¹, food allergy is one of the most common allergic diseases. As the prevalence of food allergy is greater among children than adults², food allergy has been recognised as a major paediatric health problem in western countries. The number of hospital admissions for severe allergic reaction³ in children has increased 7-fold in the past 10 years in Europe⁴.

“Food allergy is not a trivial disease. No cure has been found yet and the disease is so unpredictable that it often causes anxiety in patients and caregivers, leading to social exclusion because of the fear of eating dangerous foods by mistake. Only clear information on ingredients and disease management can help food allergy patients”, says Breda Flood, EFA President.

Food allergy is a major public health problem: governments and the general public are expected to face increasing direct and indirect costs, due to its major effects on lifestyle and quality of life^{4,5}.

The [Beware of Allergy campaign](#) highlights the increasing incidence and burden of food allergy and of severe allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis and calls on patients, healthcare professionals and pharmacists to familiarise themselves how to recognise early and manage these diseases.

“By focusing on education for food allergy prevention, early diagnosis and correct management, EAACI hopes to help patients and their families to better control their food allergy and improve their quality of life and to increase the resources allocated by the society to manage the allergy epidemic”, says Antonella Muraro, EAACI Secretary General and President Elect. Muraro has also coordinated the publication of the [Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Guidelines](#), to translate best science into best practice.

Prompt recognition and management of severe allergic reactions are of utmost importance as such reactions can be fatal. Caregivers, teachers and parents should be provided with information on how to manage severe allergic reactions, including adrenaline auto-injectors and instructions on how and when to use it⁶. It is crucial to better inform schools and restaurants staff so they can help patients avoid accidental exposure and make appropriate food choices⁶.

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Notes

EAACI's Beware of Allergy campaign is available in 5 languages: www.bewareofallergy.com

More information about food allergy and anaphylaxis can be found on [EAACI website](#) and [EAACI Patients website](#).

Anaphylaxis is a severe generalised or systemic hypersensitivity reaction that is potentially fatal^{2,3}. It is characterised by its rapid onset and triggering respiratory or circulatory problems, generally associated to changes in the skin and mucous membranes. Food, medicines and insect stings are the three most important causes of anaphylaxis. In children, food is the most common cause. Drugs and hymenoptera venom are the most common causes of anaphylaxis in adults. Although considerably under-diagnosed, the epidemiological figures show an incidence rate of anaphylaxis in Europe ranging from 1.5 to 8 per 100,000 people/year, with an increase in cases of anaphylaxis in the last twenty years¹.

The European Union has recently adopted a new regulation to provide consumers with clearer and more accurate information on allergens present in food products:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/proposed_legislation_en.htm

1. [The epidemiology of anaphylaxis in Europe: a systematic review. Allergy. 2014 Aug;69\(8\):992-1007](#)
2. [Anaphylaxis: guidelines from the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. Allergy. 2014 Aug;69\(8\):1026-45.](#)
3. [Food allergy and anaphylaxis guidelines: diagnosis and management of food allergy. Allergy. 2014 Aug;69\(8\):1008-25.](#)
4. [Prevalence of common food allergies in Europe: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Allergy. 2014 Aug; 69\(8\):992-1007.](#)
5. [EAACI food allergy and anaphylaxis guidelines: food allergy health-related quality of life measures. Allergy. 2014 Jul; 69\(7\):845-53.](#)
6. [EAACI food allergy and anaphylaxis guidelines: managing patients with food allergy in the community. Allergy. 2014 Aug; 69\(8\):1046-57.](#)

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PRESS RELEASE



About EAACI

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 7,800 members from 121 countries, as well as 47 National Allergy Societies.

About EFA

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a non-profit network of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) patients organisations, representing 38 national associations in 25 countries and over 400,000 patients. Visit www.efanet.org for more information.