

Eating Safely:

Owen's Law - Telling the server isn't enough? - Episode 2

Claire McGuigan, Paul Carey, Iain Ferris, Dominic Jones, Paul Carey, Dominic Teague and Emma Kocher:

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Welcome back to part two of the Eating Safely podcast, where we discuss Owen's law, and why asking the server isn't enough. Before we begin, I want to let you know who you'll be hearing from in today's episode.

We're joined by a remarkable panel, whose work experience and advocacy are helping to reshape how we think about food allergy safety in the UK. So let me tell you who will be joining us.

With us today are Paul Carey, Owen's father and co-founder of the Owen's Law campaign, who will explain a little bit to us about why this change in legislation is urgently needed in the UK. And then we will have Dominic Jones is with us.

He's an allergy advocate. He's a lawyer by background and a former hospitality owner, who will share his insights and show us how restaurants can embed safety in their systems, instead of relying on chance conversations that we've heard about in the previous podcast.

And then we'll have Dominic Teague, who is an executive chef with over 30 years experience, and he has very generously come to share his knowledge on how he has transformed a restaurant in London into a completely gluten- and dairy-free dining space.

And he's going to share about what he's learned about how he's created those safe and inclusive spaces by adapting his business practices to keep people with food allergies safe when they're dining out. So that's very interesting.

And then we have Iain Ferris. Iain is a lecturer in food safety and a former enforcement officer, who will help us understand a little bit more about food standards, about regulation, about staff training, all-- and I suppose the question there is, really, about how will that all evolve, if we're serious about protecting lives.

So each of these people with us today, they bring unique and valuable insights. And all of this will make for a very interesting discussion. So if we go back to episode one, you've heard from Emma Kocher, who shared her very deeply personal story of her brother Owen, who was an 18-year-old fellow who lived with multiple food allergies his whole life.

He managed them with great care and trusted the information that he was given by the server on the day that he was eating out. But unfortunately, that information that he received, even when he declared his allergens up front wasn't correct.

And this was the hole in the system, that cost him his life. His family, through the Owen's Law campaign are very clear, that had the ingredients and the allergens been written down on the menu, he would definitely have had a better chance of avoiding them.

So today, we continue with Owen's story in a way that it will help us to discuss how it can be a meaningful guide to us developing lasting change for those people with food allergies. So let's get the conversation started.

Honestly, I'm so grateful to you all for coming along and sharing your experiences and expertise. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about yourselves and how you became interested in food allergies. Iain, over to you.

IAIN FERRIS: Hi, my name is Iain Ferris. I'm a lecturer at the University of Birmingham specializing in food safety, food standards and food law. Prior to that, I was an enforcement officer with a local authority for 15 years, and prior to that, a catering manager for 11 years.

The last few years, I've had an interest in legislation, particularly around things like food standards and in particular food allergens.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Thanks, Iain. Over to you, Dominic Jones.

DOMINIC JONES: Hi, I'm Dominic Jones, I'm a lawyer by training, but also work in financial services and own a restaurant group. My involvement in the field of food allergy advocacy started with the diagnosis of my daughter, suffering from food allergies over eight years ago.

And since that time, I've worked in a range of areas, organizing conferences, speaking at conferences, writing, and being a member of the UK National Allergy Strategy Group, working with like-minded people around the country and around the world to look at how we can make both dining out and eating food safer and more welcoming for those with food allergies.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Thank you, Dominic. Then over to you, Paul.

PAUL CAREY: Hello. I'm Paul Carey, I'm Owen's father, and along with my daughter, Emma, running the Owen's Law Campaign, which is a very simple objective of ensuring and making it obligatory, i.e. the law that restaurants and food business operators should state the allergens in their food, in writing, at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask. And it's as simple as that. That's our campaign.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Thank you, Paul. And then, Dominic Teague, your turn.

DOMINIC TEAGUE: Hello, I'm Dominic Teague, I'm the executive chef at One Aldwych Hotel in Central London, and I've been a chef for over 32 years. And the last 13 of those, I've been here at the hotel, and we made a decision, nine years ago, to turn the main restaurant into a gluten- and dairy-free restaurant, which, at the time, caused a lot of interest in the free market. And it's something that we've evolved over time. And we, obviously, take that very, very seriously and a reputation for that in the luxury market.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Lovely. Thanks, everybody. Now that you've met our panel and heard the breadth of experience that they all bring, I'd like to begin today, with someone that is at the very heart of this conversation.

I'm honored to have Paul Carey Jones, Owen's father and co-founder of Owen's Law Campaign, with us, and ask Paul if he would like to tell us a little bit more about what is needed, and why this change matters so deeply now.

PAUL CAREY: Thanks, Claire. Yeah, Owen was just a few weeks after his 18th birthday, and being at that age, he was in that transition from being a teenager to being an adult.

But because he had been trained, because we had always looked after him, he was very confident in talking about his allergies and expressing the need for food to be carefully prepared.

And in the particular case that he suffered, the menu didn't state the allergens anywhere, but it did say that the chicken he was looking to eat was plain grilled chicken. That's what it said on the menu.

We managed to get a copy of the menu sometime after his death. And the server assured him that, that was OK, and we have witnesses to that. All that was accepted in the inquest. So he assumed that plain grilled chicken meant plain grilled chicken.

And as Emma said, it was buttermilk-- marinated in buttermilk. And he died within hours at the foot of the London Eye. It took us some time-- if you think about this, we had a number of things going on after that.

Brexit was one, and then along came COVID. And so, therefore, the news was occupied by many other important things. And so it wasn't until 2021 that we decided to launch our campaign. And we were very lucky to get some very early publicity through things, like the BBC.

And it's a family-run campaign. It's not a big ticket operation. It's funded by me and Emma. My family members, we pay our own way. We don't have sponsorship. We don't have any celebrity endorsement, not yet anyway.

We do everything ourselves. You could say it's very much a family-run thing. More recently, we've had the support of another family that also suffered a similar loss of a daughter and also a young lad now, who's just finished his A-levels, actually.

But he's very, very focused and very keen to help, and he suffers very much himself from allergies. So our campaign is very simple. There are a couple of parts to it, but the prime part is that very simply, we want it to become law.

That food business operators-- and this is restaurants, takeaways, whether you're high end or low end, you're food business operator-- for the information on the allergens that are in your food to be stated in writing, at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask.

Those three simple things-- in writing, at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask. Now, that might mean to most people putting it on the menu, but it doesn't have to be on the menu. It doesn't have to be the words.

It could be symbols. It could be numbers. It could be letters, some other way of indicating the allergens, as long as there's a clear table, so you can see what symbol means what.

It doesn't have to be on a piece of paper. It could be on an app. It could be on a chalkboard. It could be in any sort of format. As long as it's got to be in writing. And the whole point of this is that it takes away the risk of the server, who's often young and often certainly in a lot of establishments not there for long.

They may not have had much training. It takes the risk away from them. It means that they are not responsible for delivering that information. It's there in writing. They don't have to tell you.

It puts the responsibility further up the tree, further up the food chain, you could say, to the manager or to a supervisor or to the chef, to sit down and think about, and put it in writing, what are the allergens in each of your dishes.

And we know it's not difficult because we know there are lots of restaurants already doing this on a voluntary basis. We'll come back to that later on, perhaps, but it's not impossible to do. And we've spoken to a number of chefs around the country that say, yes, it can be done, and lots of chefs are doing it.

Lots of places are doing it, from small pubs to big chains. We're seeing around the country lots of examples. For example, Leon, the big chain of food shops and takeaways in railway stations, above the counter, you'll see all the menu, and it's all there, the allergens are on every dish.

It's all easily done. We've spoken to lots of chefs across the country that say to us, it's not difficult to do. So this process of actually writing it down is, in some way, a psychological way of making sure that whoever's doing that thinks about it and takes that extra bit of care.

And once it's in writing it's much harder to make a mistake. It's easier for the customer to see. We're also asking that it should also become less mandatory, but good practice for the waiter to still ask, are you suffering from any allergies?

And that also happens quite a lot across the country. But that is, perhaps, harder to legislate for. It's harder to test whether that conversation took place, where it's much easier-- it would be much easier for enforcement officers to go into a restaurant and see whether the information on allergens is being provided in writing, as we want it to be.

And I think-- and I know we're going to hear from some chefs and some restaurant operators later on, the two Dominics, it becomes a marketing opportunity. It becomes a reason for-- approximately 25% of the population suffer from an allergy or intolerance of some kind.

So you're opening up your establishment for a huge chunk of people, 15-plus million people in the country, who would prefer to come to your restaurant rather than to walk away because they're not sure. So it has a lot of benefits, in terms of accuracy, responsibility for who provides that information, and it's also a marketing opportunity.

And it's very simple. We've asked the government to change the law. Is the food information regulations from 2014, which, in turn, were driven by an EU directive. Of course, in those days, we were in the EU, and this directive said, you have to provide the information on allergens.

It didn't say how, so it was left to individual member states. And we'll talk about the Republic of Ireland later on, perhaps, because they took the decision right at the very beginning to make it mandatory to put the information in writing.

So the Republic of Ireland have had Owen's law since 2014, and I believe Norway does something similar, too. But here in the UK, it wasn't written like that. It was written with some flexibility so that the food business operator could choose how to provide that information.

If they provide it verbally, they have to put up signs around the place. And you often go into a restaurant these days and see signs that says, if you have an allergy, please speak to your server. But we want the information to be in writing on the menu or wherever, at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask.

And we believe that if that could be implemented in law, the world would be a lot safer for those who suffer from allergens. The good news is, and maybe we'll come on to this later on, is that the Food Standards Agency, back in December 2023, adopted Owen's Law as a matter of policy.

And since March of this year, 2025, they have issued guidance on how food business operators should be providing that information in writing. So we are slowly getting there, but it's not yet mandatory. It's not yet compulsory for this guidance to be followed to.

Our next job as a campaign is to make sure that the government takes that guidance and makes it mandatory guidance. I'll stop at that point because, otherwise, I could go on forever. But there are good signs coming out of the industry. Ireland can do it. If they can do it, why can't we? And if Norway can do it, why can't we?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Thanks for a couple of interesting points. And I think the one around, it's easy, or it should be relatively easy for establishments to do that. I think this might be a nice time to bring in Dominic Teague, if we could ask you.

Dominic, what do you think about the idea that Owen's Laws proposing around, making sure that business operators state in writing at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask to have all that information around food allergies available to them, so they can make an informed choice, a safe choice.

What do you think of that in terms of, are you able to do it in your place of work, how hard, how difficult it is. Maybe you've got some tips or tricks that make it easier for others?

DOMINIC TEAGUE: Yeah. I mean, fundamentally, it should be a no-brainer. I mean, it's not difficult to do that. I mean, Paul raised lots of interesting points there. And this is such a big topic to discuss.

There's so many angles you can come at it. But yes, fundamentally, the thing is, the way I see it from our side of the past, if you like, the whole allergy, the labeling, the communication, and everything, it needs to become more of a culture in this country, in the hospitality sector.

And if I look back, when I first started my career, over 30 years ago, food safety was completely different to what it is now. We never took a fridge temperature or anything. I mean, look at the work involved now in food safety and what we do.

And then, obviously, the allergen awareness within that is huge. But the problem with the allergy side of it, of course, that took-- well, in my career, 30 odd years to get to that point, where we're in a much better place.

But we can't wait 30 more years to get this right. We need it needs to be sped up. It needs to be expedited a bit, and that's the challenge. I think, as a nation, we're too blasé about it, and it's not taken seriously enough by enough people.

And that's the frustration that I see. And I do get really frustrated when I see that when I go out to eat places, and you look at the lack of information coming from the team or the server or the managers.

And I know how hard we work in other places as well. There's lots of people doing a lot of good stuff. So it's really frustrating, and I think that almost goes back to the food safety side of it. And I think Iain's probably more qualified to talk about that than myself.

But it's the inconsistencies that frustrate us, and I can only imagine what it must be for the person that's challenged with that or suffering from that, because the inconsistencies is the problem that makes it frustrating.

So how do we get past that or how do we expedite that, then I don't have the answer for that in a half an hour conversation now. But there's lots of things need to happen in that. But I think, for one, I think businesses need more support, for sure.

We're very lucky we're a big, fancy luxury hotel, and obviously, we're suffering with what's happening in hospitality at the moment in the country. But obviously, we can afford to have a consultant company on board that works with me closely with food safety, and allergens is a big part of that.

Now, they have definitely improved their focus on allergens in the last few years, absolutely, which is a positive. But not everyone can afford that support and that guidance from a company you're paying for.

And then the ones that can't, how do we help them more? I think the government needs to do more to help them. I think there's a massive issue around the inconsistencies of when people are going in.

So I think Paul made a comment there about it can be numbers or symbols or whatever, which is fine. And I don't disagree with that. But I think if it became-- if everybody was singing from the same hymn sheet.

When they walked into a place, whether it was a pub, a fancy restaurant, a Chinese takeover, whatever, that would alleviate a lot of the issues as well, because just make it more consistent. So there's many, many things that need looking at and discussing and solving. It needs to be done quicker, I believe, because, obviously, the consequences, as we've heard, are horrific. So I think that's the problem.

Food safety definitely improved over 30 years, but we can't be waiting 30 years to get allergens up to allergen awareness and safety, up to a level where we're all happy, because it's just too long. So there needs to be a lot of action from a lot of people.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think you hit the nail on the head. I think it's around culture. It's around hospitality culture, and it's about who sets that culture. Surely, some of that has to come from the government in terms of law and regulations and inspections and things like that so that people, throughout the whole service chain, from front of house to taking your order, to the kitchen, to you receive your safe meal, to give you a review so that everybody knows what the food allergen customer's journey looks like, and has enough checks and balances in place to keep them safe.

So I suppose, I suppose my question then is if businesses need more support, and we need to make it consistent, and given the food standards agencies report where they had said that even whenever food allergen information was available, it said 3 out of 10 thought that the food allergy food allergen information was too difficult to understand, and 7 out of 10 still needed to speak to somebody for clarification.

So I think your point is well made around making sure that the actual information around food allergens should be standardized, but it should be standardized at a level that is understandable for everyone, and maybe making it having less option around how it's there in terms of symbols, maybe having it almost decreed that it has to be done in a certain way maybe would make that safe.

What do you think? I'll bring in Iain Ferris there with that. Iain, what do you think? From a regulatory point of view, is that too big an ask, or would it be possible? Would it be useful?

IAIN FERRIS: I think in order, usually, to get some legislation like this through, I think providing a certain degree of flexibility, I think would be helpful. And certainly, from a trip that we did a couple of years ago over to Ireland, it was interesting to see the different ways that different businesses presented allergy information.

And I think that provided that a level of flexibility for different types of businesses to be able to comply with the law. And there were some methods that were seemed to be more suitable for certain types of businesses.

For example, when you had a restaurant or a pub, they tended to have-- on the outside, they would have a menu on the outside, the main menu, and then they would have some symbols or numbers, and then a key at the bottom of the menu.

That was relatively easy to negotiate. And then other businesses that were, perhaps, less likely to be chains and so on. So the independent restaurants that maybe didn't have the financial resources and backing behind it tended to, perhaps, have a matrix-type situation, where it was handwritten.

And then they ticked which allergens were in which dish, and that worked for them and was, obviously, more cost effective for them. And then other restaurants, like maybe a coffee shop or something, where they were displaying cakes, and so on, in the display case, they would have the name of the cake and the allergens that were present within that cake in a little label in the front of it.

So I think it's OK to provide a certain degree of flexibility, with regard to how the written allergy information is provided to allow that flexibility for the business. But arguably, the current law that we have for the allergy information to be provided in any way that the business desires makes it quite difficult from an enforcement perspective to actually say that a business is non-compliant.

Because if take, for example, you went and did an inspection, you say, well, how do you provide-- so they put up their sign, saying allergy information is provided. The food information regulations does not even require, for example, that the allergy information must be in written form behind the counter or anything like that.

Because then, technically, what could happen is, you could go in there, and you could ask, does this contain a milk? And if they say, no, no, it doesn't, and it actually doesn't contain milk,

then provided they're given the correct information, there is no offense that's been committed under food information, a food information laws.

But that doesn't provide that assurance of potentially that they may make a mistake or looking at different ingredients. So they could, in theory, go to the back of the counter and have a look at all the ingredients lists from all the different products, and then work out that way.

So there's that they can do it in any way that they want. So in terms of the documentation, there's that weakness there. And it's very difficult to say that's non-compliant. I think having a requirement to have written information in some form adds that clarity from an enforcement perspective is that it's clear what the rules are.

You have to have the information on the allergens that are in this product, and it must be in a written form, and it must be available without the consumer having to ask. So it's very clear what the law requires.

The challenge, I think, from a legal perspective, is around areas, such as the way that the businesses are run, and there'd be arguments, with regard to things like if a business runs out of a particular ingredient, they go out and buy something else and replace things or the chefs, want to create a new dish.

And they have new ingredients that come in, and I guess, those kind of challenges, which they mention about small businesses, and potentially, where you have small businesses that are maybe English may not be their first language and mistakes and errors.

And then there's the concerns about when written information is provided, if it's not accurate, then does that pose a greater concern? And having written allergy information, without having to ask, there is this concern whether that will dissuade the person from having the conversation and telling somebody that they have an allergy.

So these are some of the arguments that are used to push back against Owen's Law, that, perhaps, some of the other chefs that we have here as well can probably provide about how they address those things.

But I believe that, yes, we can do better, and I think having better legislation will help. But there are these challenges, also, that we have to address. And I think Dominic hit it on the head when he talked about culture, that the needs are changing.

In culture, people need to understand allergies better. We need to train better. Our training courses need to talk about things, like when we deal with suppliers, we need to consider when ingredients changes. Because change is bad for somebody with an allergy.

If you go into a restaurant today, and you order to even just as a regular customer, when you go to a restaurant, where there's an Indian restaurant or Chinese takeaway or something like that, you expect it to taste the same as it did the last time that you ordered it, and the same ingredients.

So for somebody with an allergy, that's even worse, because, of course, you might have asked that time and said, OK, does it contain this? And they say, no, and you're fine with it. The next day, you go there, you may not ask again, because you asked yesterday or last week, or whatever, and it was fine.

But if they've changed the ingredients, that's a massive-- that's a massive issue. So these are some of the challenges that we have to address. And legislation is one part, training is another, and guidance and so on around that topic. But I'll give somebody else an opportunity to make some further comments on that.

PAUL CAREY: Could I just interject, Claire, on the culture thing?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, please, Paul.

PAUL CAREY: Because some of us are old enough to remember the days when you didn't have to wear seatbelts in a car. And these days, everybody, pretty much, it's second nature to put your seat belt on, but only because the law was changed, and it was made compulsory.

And it's the same now with this campaign of ours. It will only change-- the culture will change because we make it compulsory. And in 10, 15 years time, people, like the two Dominic's here, will be doing it through second nature because it's become the seat belt law equivalent.

And that's how you change culture through forcing people to do it, as much as anything else. So it's very parallel-- it's a parallel to the seat belt laws, and that's all we're asking.

IAIN FERRIS: I agree with that, Paul, too. I agree, and I think we saw that in Ireland, when you had this-- because, obviously, they've had the requirements since 2014.

I remember sitting at a bar and talking to one of the chefs about their daily special and how they were quite surprised that the rest of the EU and the UK didn't have the rules that they had.

And I was asking about their daily specials, and they say, well, yeah, when we work out the daily specials, we work out the profit margins and the ingredients in it or whatever. And then as a matter, of course, we also identify what allergens are in that daily special.

When we print off the menu for the daily specials, it also includes the allergens. And it was like, it was a really good example of, they get it, and it's like the laws have been different. And they've just adapted to it. They did say that many of them, when we spoke to them, that yes, it's a bit of a pain, initially, and so on.

But if things don't change anyway, if you've got a standard menu, your standard ingredients, and you're aware that if things change, that you change things, like the allergy information, then it shouldn't be too much of an issue. But it's just addressing those. It just takes a bit of time and effort and that culture, as you rightly say.

EMMA KOCHER: Can I jump in as well? So going back to the seat belt analogy, which I know my dad loves, forgive me if I'm wrong. I'm possibly too young to remember. Wasn't it just the front seat belts that were made law, and then later on, it became law to have the back seat belts as well, the rear seat belts.

Now, we like to use this analogy to discuss Natasha's Law, which came into effect in 2021, and that covers allergen information displayed on pre-packaged food. Now, that leaves a whole load of people eating out at much more risk, at much greater risk than those grabbing a ready-meal from a supermarket or a sandwich from Tesco or whatever.

So we like to use the analogy that the front seat belts law is like Natasha's Law, and it wouldn't take much to just put the rear seat belt law into effect and cover food, when you're eating out.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think that's a very powerful message. I think it is, and I think the parallels and the comparisons really do work well, Emma. I think there's no doubt that what Owen's Law is trying to achieve by putting the allergen information in writing at the point of ordering and without the customer having to ask, well, it's a game changer for people, like my family, especially other families that are living with food allergies.

It just makes it easier for you to make an informed choice about where you would go to eat, and if it was safe. But I think I'd like to bring in Dominic Jones, because I think, although, yes, that is a great place, and it's a necessary step, I just worry that on its own, it's not enough to keep people with food allergies safe.

And for me, it seems to place as well, just the burden of responsibility at the consumer's feet. And surely, there's more of a balance to be had. Surely, we need more leadership from the government, more input from the FSA. And maybe the businesses to step up and do a bit more.

What do you think, Dominic?

DOMINIC JONES: So if we look at who's responsible for food allergy safety, clearly, the laws are the starting point. They need to be enforced. They need to be clear. And I totally agree that having written allergen information at the point of ordering in a restaurant will bring us in line with the pre-packaged for direct sell food in making it much safer for those eating out with allergens.

Not just because they have the information, because if you produce that information, as Iain has already alluded to, you have a process behind that. But the fact is that ticking boxes and laws don't create the full picture and the full safety package, if you like.

There is a whole range of people who are responsible for ensuring that those with food allergies eat out safely. So it's not just a legal regulation, but it's also education and understanding. And indeed, even those suffering from food allergies have to take some responsibility and understanding the issues that food service providers deal with.

And also in making sure that those that suffer from intolerances and have dietary choices, that they're absolutely clear that when they are in a restaurant and saying, oh, well, a little bit of that doesn't bother me, that they're undermining all of the safety arrangements that are put in place, that should have protected Owen, when he went out to eat.

So I think that's really important that we look at this from a holistic perspective. The legislation and the legal framework is absolutely the bedrock of creating safety, but how you deliver that, both from an operational perspective and how that fits into wider society, with education starting at school and on through with everyone else, really, is the key part.

And I think that's something that we'll come on to, maybe later, that the National Allergy Strategy is looking at, that you can't be siloed. And I think it's the same thing when you're designing a dish.

If you design the dish, because it's commercially viable, because it's attractive, because it looks good on Instagram, and then you come to your allergen process and tick the boxes afterwards.

You're unlikely to get as safe a process than if you are not looking in silos, and you are treating the allergens, which is what we do in our business as a key part of the dish creation and the process and the operational framework that you're designing. That's when you, I think, achieve real safety.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: That's very interesting point. Does anybody want to comment or reply to Dominic?

IAIN FERRIS: I agree that as well as the issue, that Owen's law will address the deliberately added ingredient issue and will also protect consumers from what we refer to as the unexpected allergen.

And so one of the commonalities of some of the fatalities that we've seen, including Owen, including Natasha, and there are many others that you have, is what they refer to as the unexpected allergen.

So in Owen's case, the server didn't expect milk to be present. In Natasha's case, she didn't expect sesame to be present in the bread. In Chloe Gilbert, it was milk in kebab meat. There's another person that was peanut in pizza dough. These are allergens that you don't expect necessarily to be there.

When I produce-- at home, if I'm making a spaghetti Bolognese, I might add Worcestershire sauce into it, which, obviously, contains fish. And so, of course, then people with allergies, then they might be managing their allergy themselves to might not think to ask about, say, fish in Bolognese sauce and so on.

So having the allergy information is provided in a form on the menu raises awareness of these kind of hidden allergens, but also encourages people, like Dominic, to consider what allergens, potentially, they are using in their product.

It's also that good starting point for a conversation. That, actually, if you have allergy, you can look at the menu and say, OK, I can't have that, can't have that, can't have that, but I can potentially have this, and then you can have that conversation.

And it also drives the ability to be able to assess what the risk of cross-contamination. And I know Owen's Law doesn't deal with cross-contamination, but this is one of the areas that, I think, food businesses are get concerned with, about the may contain statements and also limits people's choices.

Because businesses then say, we can't guarantee that any of our foods are free from any of the 14 allergens. Well, then, technically, to make a statement like that, well, let's start with the point of, well, what allergens do you actually handle?

So, actually, if you only handling five or six allergens, why can't you guarantee that your foods are free from the other eight? So you have that more concise information that is provided. So at that starting point, that helps in other areas and not just the delivery added or the unexpected allergens.

It has that thing of helping with regard to that accessibility, and then the food business knows what allergens that their handling.

DOMINIC JONES: Could I just step in there and just give you a couple of examples? I mean, like all of us on this call, we could speak for hours about the process we have in place. But just to give you some examples, we have a risk scoring of every dish, as part of the design process in our restaurants.

And one of the things we look at is hidden allergens, exactly the unexpected allergens that Iain has just alluded to there. So the way we address that, is that if we have something like sesame oil or milk or soya in a dish, we will ensure there's a visual clue in the dish.

So if we use sesame oil, we'll put sesame seeds on the top of the dish. If we use soya or soy sauce, we put edamame beans on the dish. And what that means is that we have a whole design process, looking at all the control points, but ultimately had—

If a guest is presented with a dish, where the processes are broken down, like we've heard today, but there is a visual clue on that dish, yes, the process has gone wrong, but the chances are the customer is not going to eat that dish because they will see it.

So there's a very good example. You might have a Thai prawn green curry that has shrimp paste in it. A chicken one, we wouldn't serve with it, but we would serve it with prawns on the top because somebody with a crustacean allergy would see it.

Simple things like that can make a real difference, and they're not-- you can't prescribe them in legislation. That's why I think the wider issue of looking this more holistically is so important.

And coming to Iain's point as well, about the guarantees and the powers, it's understanding that the challenges that come from food allergy is not just about keeping people safe and avoiding hospitalisations, et cetera.

It's also their mental health and all the anxiety, which is a huge issue relating to this. So my daughter ate out very recently in a well-known pizza restaurant, that we know, like many, many larger groups have, for risk reasons, taken nuts, peanuts and tree nuts, off their menus.

And as I teach it to her, we teach her to be assertive and to flag her allergens every time she goes in and eats. And everything was fine. She was comfortable eating, but she's not really.

And then right at the end, the server said, but I have to warn you, I can't guarantee that there aren't any nuts in this pizza.

My daughter's face immediately dropped, and immediately, her safety that she felt in that brand was broken. And that was to do with training. That's not legislation or anything else. It's just understanding how it is and how you serve and better deal with food allergic customers.

So it really is a holistic approach that you need. The legislation is the bedrock. It's fundamental, and we have to see things, like Owen's Law brought in place, but it's a much bigger picture to create the real safety that customers want to see.

Actually, the law isn't going to protect you completely, and nobody with food allergies expects zero risk. What we're trying to do is reduce risk down, as much as possible, so that these terrible circumstances and situations that we hear about are just not happening, and people feel safer and more welcomed when they go out to eat.

PAUL CAREY: If I may, on training, the question for me is, how well can you train someone? And it so much depends on the environment in which you work. And maybe, Dominic Teague can tell us about his high-end restaurant versus working in the likes of fast food.

I'm not going to name a name because I don't want to get sued for anything. But just like the restaurant that Owen ate in, is there a difference in-- you've got high turnover of staff. They may not be there for very long.

Whereas, in Dominic's place, you may have people that are there for years and have a very high level of training. So I don't know whether Dominic Teague can fill us in on the training challenge because that, to me, is part of it.

And it's part of our campaign. Our campaign isn't just about getting the written information in law, it's also about better training as well.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: There was something you just said, Dominic, which really struck me, the story of your daughter going out to eat and how her sense of safety was completely shattered, that moment that the server said, we cannot guarantee this is free from your allergens.

And I think it's useful to pause on that for a moment, because what she heard in that moment wasn't a careful business disclaimer. It was really someone saying, I'm not sure this food is safe for you to eat.

And for our food allergic customers, that can mean-- how they hear that, it can mean things-- like it is possible that you could actually die from eating this, what I've set down in front of you. And that is traumatic, and it's devastating thing to hear.

But I truly believe that people, working in the food industry don't really appreciate that. And I, myself, have watched my own daughter, as a teenager, cry and fear when those very words have been said to her.

And we've got up and left restaurants, when we felt the servers lack of knowledge on the ingredients in the food they are serving or if they're unsure how food is prepared or cooked in the kitchen, or if there's just that general attitude that they're not that bothered about what we're asking, and they're not taking allergy seriously enough to keep us safe.

Then, we just don't stay. But what's interesting about our conversation today, as you were all saying, that it doesn't have to be this way. And I truly believe that many people work in hospitality, you don't fully understand the opportunity that they have to build trust and loyalty with their customers by taking control of the food allergy conversation and making allergies a core aspect of their menu planning and staff training, as you've said.

By menu planning, with allergens in mind, then staff can be transparent about what ingredients are being used in their food and how their food is being prepared, which allows them to give

the customers the right information, which enables them to make the choice, whether they eat with them or not.

So in the absence of having this transparency and this information, it has a massive impact on the mental health and well-being of food allergic customers. There's no doubt of that. And this is exactly why it matters so much.

If Owen's Law was in place, businesses would be required to provide allergen information in writing for every dish they serve, available up front and at the point of ordering, without the customer having to ask.

And it's then from that moment, someone with a food allergy can then begin to review the menu. They can begin to assess their options and ask further questions, if they need to. And that shifts the dynamic entirely.

And the transparency will follow, which will allow businesses to manage their risk better. So hearing how some businesses have already done that is really exciting, and how some chefs have already built through their energies into their menu design from the start.

And we've heard the difference that makes. It creates these wonderful inclusive spaces. And I think what it does, what you've done in sharing your examples, is you have let others see how to create spaces, where food allergic customers can feel seen and heard and genuinely welcome.

And I suppose it just makes me wonder why more businesses are not doing this. And as Paul highlighted, this is something that businesses should not be afraid of, but rather something that they can risk, manage, and with some focused effort.

And in doing so, they can be rewarded by potentially increasing the number of people who come and dine with them. So really, putting food allergy at the core of menu design isn't just the right thing to do. And it is sound business sense.

And I wonder, for many of our listeners, would they agree with this? And if you have an opinion on this, do drop us a comment, and let us know. And we'd love to hear what you think about the discussion we're having.

So as we come to the end of our second podcast, there's a couple of things worth remembering. Businesses can and are currently adapting to create welcoming, safe dining spaces for people with food allergies.

And as Dominic said, people with food allergy don't expect zero risk, but what they do expect is a professional conversation and a professional chef who knows what's in their food, and that they can tell them in writing, with confidence that their food is safe to eat.

And Owen's Law, as we've heard, is the bedrock for that change across the system, which would bring system change and cultural change in the food energy service sector.

And the analogy that was used around comparison with the seat belt legislation is a useful one to remind us of how many lives have been saved since that legislation came into place, and how car drivers behavior has changed over the years, and it's just become normal practice.

So as we finish this episode of Eating Safely podcast, let's reflect on what Dominic Teague, the executive chef, said so powerfully. He said, we can't wait another 30 years for people to take food allergies seriously.

And I think that's just right. I think he's hit the nail on the head. And I think we need change now. We need whole system change. And a law, like Owen's Law, is essential to bring that change forward.

So the next episode is our final one on this topic, so do join us, where we'll be talking more about the holistic nature of the changes that are needed in the food allergy service.

We will be discussing staff training and education on food allergy, in particular, so do tune in, and thank you for listening. And in the meantime, if you'd like to learn more about Owen's Law Campaign, you can go to the website, owens-law.co.uk. Thank you.