

Food allergy awareness survey report

June 2024

Background

In 2024, the NSW Food Authority launched an online survey at the Sydney Royal Easter Show to gather quantitative insights into community knowledge and experiences related to food allergies. The anonymous quantitative survey also provided a 'sense check' for in-depth qualitative interviews previously conducted with people with food allergies and carers.

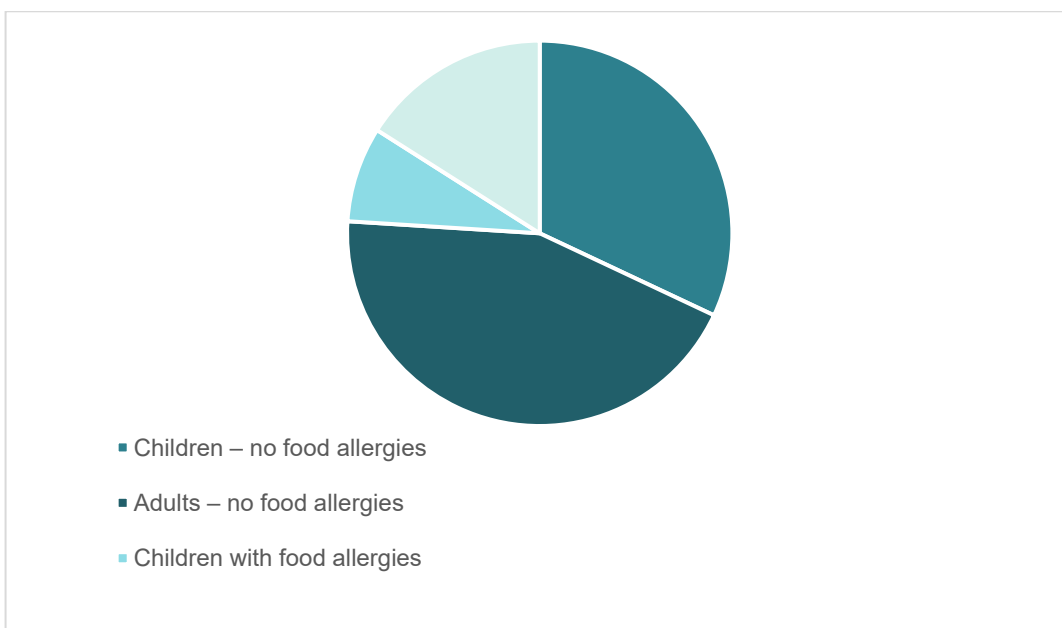
Participants completed the survey onsite using iPads or afterwards on their own device. The survey was also shared after the event through social media. The goal was to gain insights into community awareness of food allergies and the lived experiences of those with, or caring for, someone with food allergies, to inform future community education initiatives.

Survey participants

The total number of respondents to the survey was 1,003, comprising 4 groups:

- Children – no food allergies: 32%
- Adults – no food allergies: 44%
- Children with food allergies: 8%
- Adults with or caring for someone with food allergies: 16%.

Figure 1 – Survey participants.



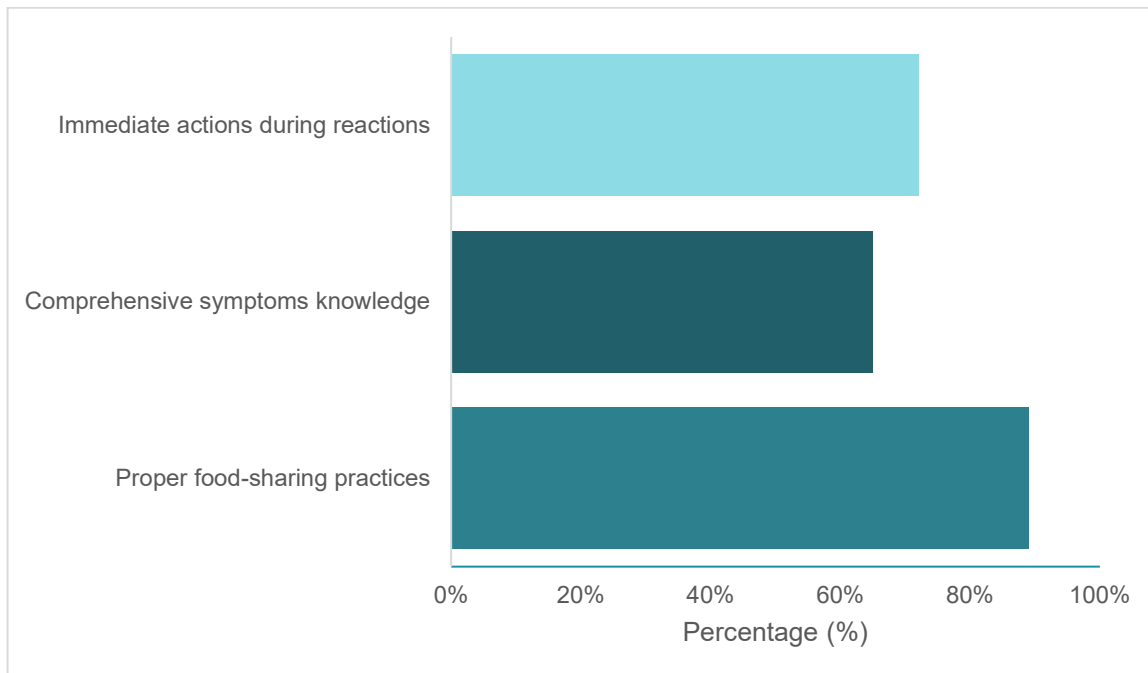
Survey results

Children – no food allergies

Children without food allergies demonstrated strong practical knowledge of actions to take if someone they are with has an allergic reaction. However, their understanding of allergy symptoms and food-sharing protocols was not as strong:

- 89% correctly identified immediate actions during allergic reactions.
- 65% understood allergy symptoms comprehensively.
- 72% correctly identified proper food-sharing practices (never share food).

Figure 2 – Children without food allergies - knowledge.

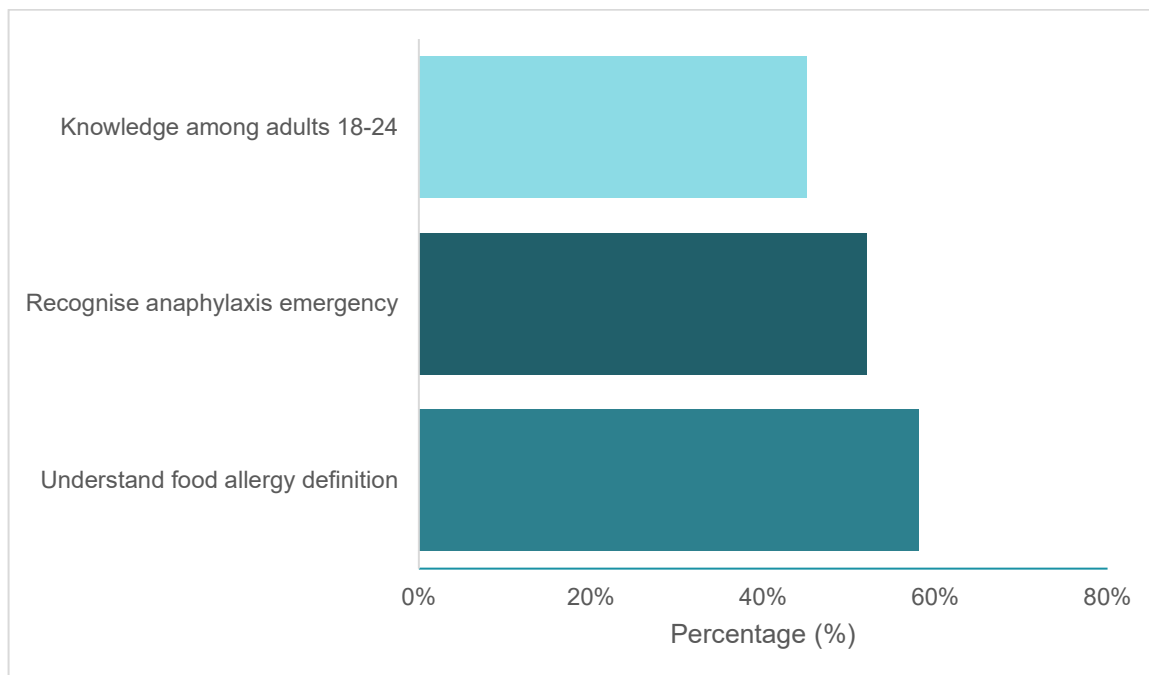


Adults – no food allergies

Adults without food allergies were not as knowledgeable compared to their child counterparts, with key gaps identified in understanding the nature of food allergies and anaphylaxis:

- 58% correctly identified what a food allergy is (immune system reaction).
- 52% correctly recognised anaphylaxis as a life-threatening emergency.
- Adults aged 18-24 demonstrated lower knowledge levels (45% correct answers on key questions).

Figure 3 – Adults without food allergies - knowledge.



Children with food allergies

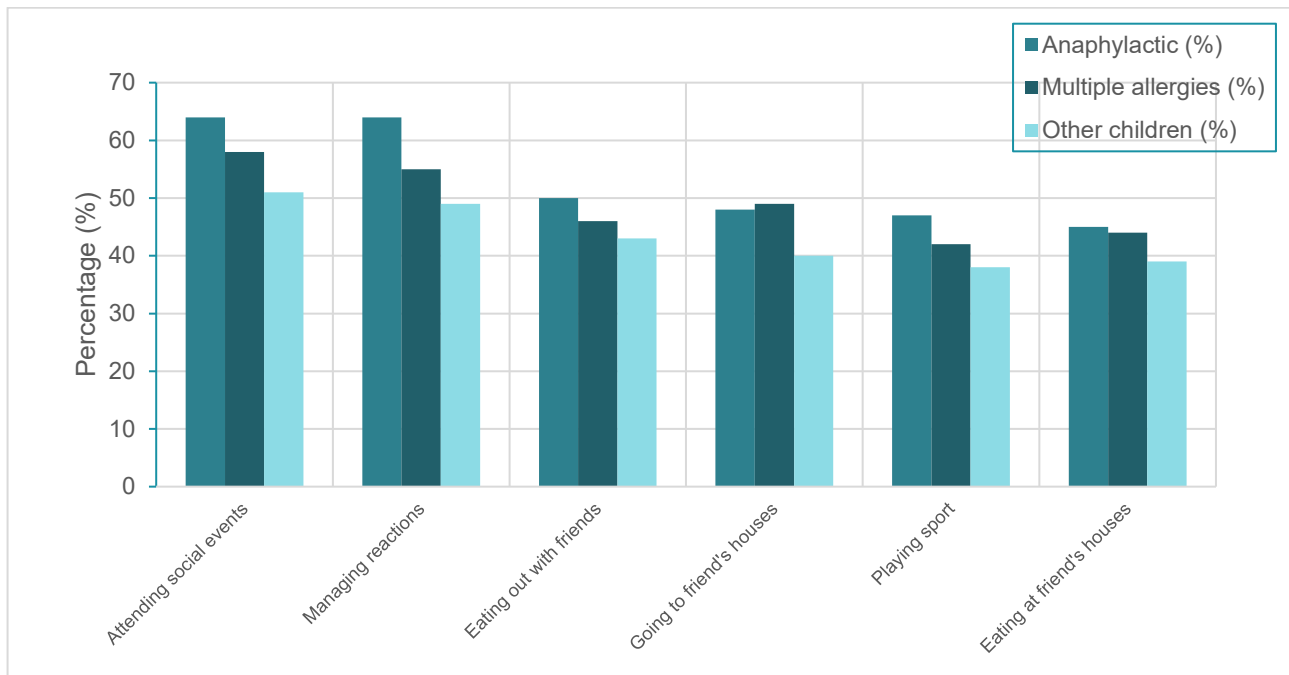
For children living with food allergies, managing reactions and social situations posed the greatest challenges. 51% found attending social events difficult and 49% identified managing reactions as significantly difficult, with higher proportions of children with anaphylaxis for whom managing reactions was the most difficult. Children with multiple food allergies also found experiences more difficult overall.

Differences were observed among children with anaphylaxis, those with multiple allergies, and other children, highlighting significantly greater challenges for those with anaphylaxis and multiple allergies.

The following areas were ranked by difficulty:

- Attending social events
- Managing reactions (ranked the most difficult by children at risk of anaphylaxis)
- Eating out with friends
- Going to friends' houses
- Playing sport
- Eating at friends' houses
- Children with multiple allergies experienced greater difficulty across social and daily activities compared to those with a single allergen.

Figure 1 - Children with food allergies – difficulties.

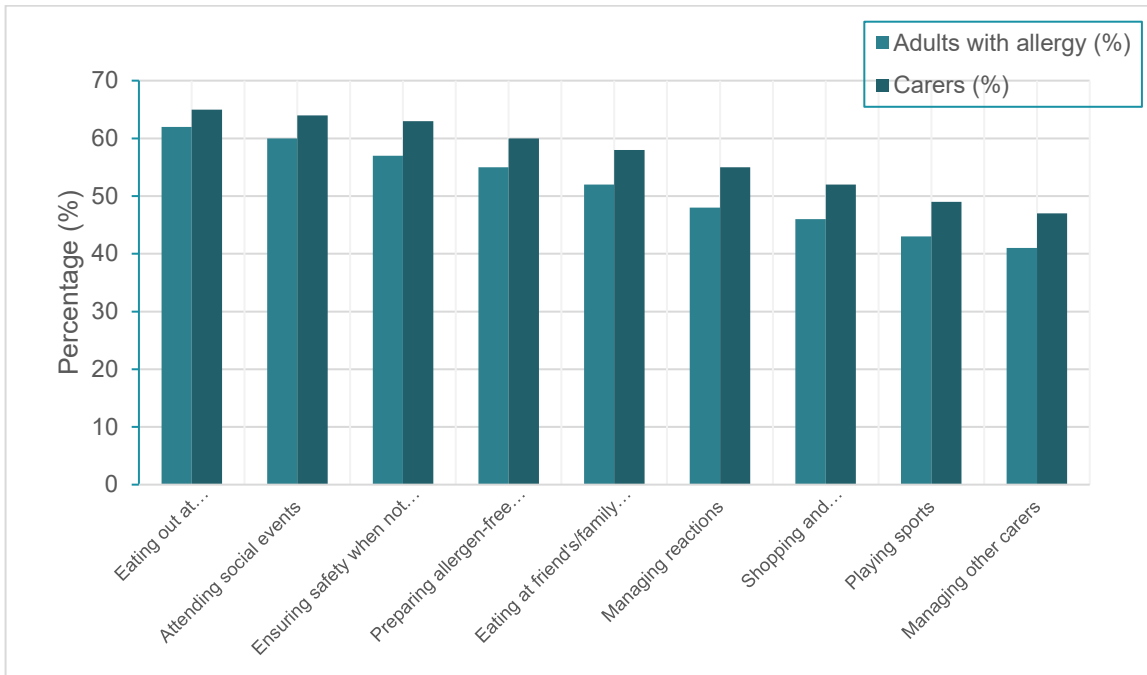


Adults with or caring for someone with food allergies

Adults managing food allergies emphasised challenges primarily related to social interactions and ensuring safety. The following areas were ranked by difficulty:

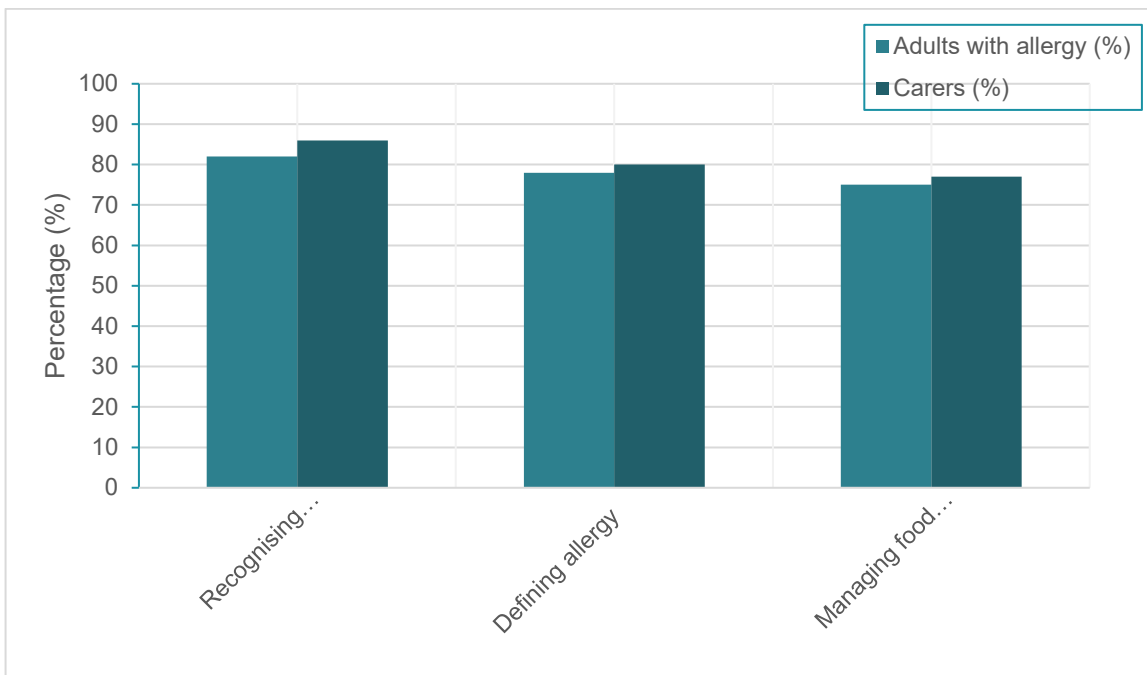
- Eating out and attending social events were identified as highly challenging by over 60% of respondents
- Ensuring food safety when not present and preparing allergen-free meals were also significant contributors to stress
- Carers of individuals with anaphylaxis or multiple allergies reported higher levels of difficulty across daily management activities
- Attending social events
- Ensuring safety when not around
- Preparing allergen-free meals
- Eating at friends'/family houses
- Managing reactions
- Shopping and interpreting labels
- Playing sports
- Managing other carers.

Figure 5 - Adults with or caring for someone with food allergies – difficulties.



Differentiation between adults with food allergies and carers revealed higher difficulty levels among carers.

Figure 6 - Adults with or caring for someone with food allergies – knowledge.



Key points

The findings highlight a clear need to strengthen public awareness, particularly among adults and young adults, to enhance allergy management and support social inclusion for those affected by food allergies.

- Children are generally more knowledgeable than adults, however there are still gaps, such as sharing food.
- A significant proportion of adults without food allergies didn't understand critical allergy pointers such as symptoms, what anaphylaxis is or the fact that allergies are becoming more common. This was particularly the case for young adults.
- Precautionary allergen labelling is not always well understood.
- For children with anaphylaxis, having reactions is the most difficult and important aspect of living with allergies, while for other children with allergies it is the social aspect.
- Overall, children with anaphylaxis found most experiences more difficult. This was followed by children with multiple food allergies, who also found most experiences more difficult than children with one food allergy but not living with anaphylaxis.

More information

- Visit [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](https://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)
- Email food.contact@dpiird.nsw.gov.au
- Phone 1300 552 406

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