

DEFINING GLUTEN-FREE in Canada

As more web-based information has become available, there is increased misunderstanding of the term 'gluten-free'. Many of the websites are international. The definition of gluten-free they will be using will either reflect the standard of practice for that country or, in many cases the information will be provided using the international FAO/WHO Codex definition as the standard of reference. This definition allows a much higher gluten content (200 ppm) than is allowed in Canada.

What is Canada's Definition for Gluten-Free?

The requirement for a gluten-free product, as stated in Canada's *Food and Drug Regulations* (B.24.018) is as follows: No person shall label, package, sell or advertise a food in a manner likely to create an impression that it is a gluten-free food unless the food does not contain wheat, including spelt and kamut, or oats, barley, rye or triticale or any part thereof.

The test presently used by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to determine the gluten content of foods has a sensitivity to a minimum of 20 ppm, which is the current allowable tolerance for Canadian products. This standard is currently under review.

Manufacturers of gluten-free foods must ensure that all ingredients in the gluten-free foods are gluten-free. They must also ensure that no cross-contamination occurs in the production facility, including facilities where gluten-containing products are also handled. Merchandising outlets (wholesale and retail) must assure that gluten-free products are handled in a manner that assures that they remain gluten-free. These standards are set out in Good Manufacturing Guidelines contained in the Code of Practice, General Principles of Food Hygiene for use by the Food Industry in Canada (CFIA).

Imported products that are labeled as gluten-free must meet the Canadian definition for gluten-free. It is the responsibility of the importer to assure that the imported products meet these requirements.

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What does this mean to a Provider of Gluten-Free Foods?

If a product, domestic or imported, is sold in Canada and is labeled gluten-free, it must meet the Canadian standard. If you are aware of products that are being sold as gluten-free that do not follow this regulation, you should report your concerns to a Manufactured Food Officer of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency at 1-800-442-2342.

If you are purchasing products outside of Canada, they will be manufactured to meet the standards of practice for that country. These standards may not comply with the Canadian standards. Care must be taken in the use of these products.

Shelley Case, RD, author of the Gluten Free Diet, has provided a great deal of very well researched information in the most recently revised printing of her book reflecting the different standards of practice for many other countries (www.glutenfreediet.ca).

Know Your Sources

When making inquiries about gluten content in manufactured products, the best information will come in writing and come from the manufacturers' representatives. Please remember that manufacturers can and do change ingredients in their products. Inquiries may need to be refreshed regularly.

Many manufacturers are now providing web based statements of product content, identifying those that are suitable for use in the gluten-free diet in their web portfolios. Many international manufacturers will make their statement referencing the Codex standard.

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