

LETTERS

ADVISORY FOOD LABELS

Clarity is necessary and only three labels may be needed

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As the father of two teenagers with immunologically confirmed nut allergy, I agree that more clarity is needed in the labelling of food products.¹ The problem is not whether labels promote “risk taking” behaviour but whether they are clear and unambiguous, so that consumers know what is probably safe and what is not. This is particularly difficult when children with nut allergy are away from their parents’ watchful eyes (for example, at school, at parties, on trips), or when they are preparing to take responsibility for their own welfare, as teenagers and beyond.

My two teenagers agreed that probably only three labels are needed:

- (1) This product contains nuts
- (2) This product does not contain nuts and was made in a nut-free factory

(3) This product does not contain nuts but was made in a factory that uses nuts.

As intelligent teenagers, they felt that this gave them the information they needed to make an informed choice—they understood that cross contamination might occur if a product was made in a factory containing nuts, but that the chances of it being at a dangerous level were small.

In the meantime, they will have to contend with the ambiguous labelling currently in existence.

Competing interests: None declared.

¹ Turner PJ, Kemp AS, Campbell DE. Advisory food labels: consumers with allergies need more than “traces” of information. *BMJ* 2011;343:d6180. (13 October.)

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