



Traveling to Italy With Food Allergies

Food allergies don't have to stop you from traveling. Whether traveling for business or pleasure, careful preparation and communication will help make your trip safe and enjoyable. This guide provides some helpful tips for traveling to Italy, plus information on understanding food labels and dining out at restaurants.

Medication

Bring a kit with all your medications, including extra epinephrine auto-injectors (EIs). In Italy, epinephrine is called "adrenalina." Food Allergy Italia also recommends carrying an Emergency Care Plan that outlines recommended treatment in case of an allergic reaction, is signed by a physician and includes emergency contact information. You can download a copy of the Food Allergy Italia Emergency Action Plan at foodallergyitalia.org/actionplan/eng. Be sure to bring extra copies with you, and keep your plan in a place where others can find it. It is important that you and your travel companions understand what to do in case of an emergency.

Ask your doctor to write prescriptions that you can carry with you. Auto-injectors available in Italy include Fastjekt® by Meda Pharma (identical to EpiPen®) and Jext® by ALK. EAls in Italy typically come in single packs, so for two EAls you will need two prescriptions.

Understand policies for carrying medication on board the aircraft. You are allowed to keep your epinephrine with you in the aircraft cabin. However, you may need to show the printed label that identifies the medication. It is recommended that you also show the prescription label from the pharmacy. Carry with you a Travel Plan completed by your doctor that confirms your food allergy and travel requirements. The Travel Plan of the International Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Alliance can be downloaded at foodallergy.org/travelplan.

Emergencies

ADMINISTER EPINEPHRINE AND DIAL 1-1-8

Always keep your epinephrine with you and easily accessible. Let your travel companions know about your allergies so they know what to do in an emergency and where your auto-injectors are located.

In the event of an emergency, administer epinephrine immediately. It is critical not to delay administering epinephrine. Next, contact emergency services by calling **1-1-8**. (While the European Union has adopted 1-1-2 as a common emergency services number, the ambulance number in Italy remains 1-1-8.) Always call 1-1-8; never drive to a hospital on your own. Be aware of your location so that you can give the dispatcher specific information. Use the words "**anaphylactic shock**" ("**shock anafilattico**") when reporting the reaction so that an emergency physician will be sent to you. The ambulance will typically arrive in a short time, but arrival time will depend upon location.

Ambulances in Italy carry epinephrine vials, but not auto-injectors. Epinephrine is administered by emergency physicians or by the paramedics if authorized remotely by the emergency physician. If you do not inform the emergency call center that you are experiencing anaphylaxis, the emergency physician may arrive separately in a "fly-car" once the paramedics learn about the anaphylactic reaction. With the assistance of the emergency physician, the ambulance will transport you to the closest hospital emergency department. It is important to remain at the hospital for at least six hours of observation because symptoms may return.

It might be helpful to purchase travel insurance prior to coming to Italy for reimbursement of costs. Regardless of coverage, emergency services are guaranteed.

Understanding Italian (EU) Food Labels

Reading food labels on packaged food is an important part of managing food allergies and avoiding your allergen. The **Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers (EU Reg.1169/2011)** requires that 14 major substances causing food allergies or hypersensitivities must be labeled if they, or ingredients made from them, are present in prepacked foods or non-prepacked foods (including conventional foods, dietary supplements, infant formula, medical foods and alcoholic drinks). These 14 labeled allergens are cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, mollusks, nuts, peanuts, soybeans, milk, celery, mustard, sesame, lupin and sulphur dioxide or sulphites exceeding 10 mg/kg or 10 mg/liter, expressed as SO₂.

In EU countries, including Italy, the use of advisory labeling (i.e., precautionary statements such as "may contain," "processed in a facility that also processes," or "made on equipment with") is voluntary and optional for manufacturers. There are no laws governing or requiring these statements, so they may or may not indicate if a product contains a specific allergen.

The 14 top allergens in Italy/EU must always be identified in the ingredient list:

There must be a clear reference to the name of the substance or product that causes the food allergy or food hypersensitivity.

Examples:
albumin (**egg**), wheat-flour, E 322 (**soy**)

The allergenic ingredient must be emphasized through a typeset that clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the list of ingredients, for example by means of the font, style or background color.

Examples:
Milkpowder, *wheat-flour*, Peanutoil



Please be aware that these are the 14 most common allergens in Italy/EU. Labeling laws differ in other countries. For example, the U.S. has identified 8 allergens that must be declared on pre-packaged food labels. In Canada, 10 major allergens are identified.

In Italy/EU, the 14 allergenic food substances and all products thereof (such as flours and oils) must be labelled unless explicitly exempted from the regulation (e.g., cereals used to make distilled alcohol, fully refined soy oil). Note that in Italy/EU, allergen labelling is mandated for 8 tree nuts: almond, hazelnut, walnut, cashew, pecan nut, Brazil nut, pistachio nut, and macadamia or Queensland nut. Food Allergy Italia advises those managing food allergies to read all labels on all packages carefully and ask for information about non-prepacked food every time.

Snacks and Meals

It is recommended that you travel with non-perishable food that is safe for you to eat in case you are unable to find allergen-free foods while traveling. Good options include dried pasta and snack bars that are free of your allergen. If you plan on staying in a hotel, consider staying in one that has a small kitchen or a refrigerator and microwave to store and prepare safe meals and snacks. Thoroughly clean work areas, surfaces, utensils and equipment before first use. You may be able to purchase some of the same products in Italy as you can back home, but remember that the same product manufactured in different countries can have different ingredients.

Dining Out at Restaurants

In December 2014 **EU Reg. 1169/2011** came into effect in EU countries, including Italy. This requires food business operators (bakeries, butchers, confectioners, ice cream parlors, restaurants, hotels, clinics, etc.) to declare allergen ingredients in non-prepacked foods as well. Each member state has the option to choose how allergen information is provided. In Italy, this information can be given orally or in writing (e.g., on a sign next to the food, in the menu, on a board, in a folder, or on a form). If allergen information is provided orally, written documentation must be easily accessible on request. Food Allergy Italia advises consumers with food allergies always to ask for written allergen information.

Regardless of the new law, Food Allergy Italia advises to plan ahead when dining out with food allergies, since many places are not aware of the new law, and implementation of the law will take time. Chain restaurants are not very common in Italy, and menus in restaurants are often variable depending on the season. Before you go to the restaurant, there are some steps you can take to see if a particular restaurant is a good choice for you. Some restaurants have websites and post their menus online for you to review ahead of time. Food Allergy Italia recommends that you call the restaurant during off-peak hours and ask to speak to the chef or manager about your food allergies, menu items and meal preparation.

Communication between restaurants and customers with food allergies is essential to a safe dining experience. The restaurant manager and waiting staff should know about your food allergy. Remind a manager or the head waiter about your allergies before you are seated. In addition to asking questions about the ingredients and preparation methods, carry a “**chef card**” that outlines the foods you must avoid. Present the card to the chef or manager for review. Chef cards can be downloaded in English/Italian at foodallergyitalia.org/chefcard.

When selecting your meal, keep it simple. If you have to ask complicated questions about the items on a menu, simple fare may be the safest. Be sure to ask what is in your dish and how it is prepared. It is important for restaurant staff to understand what you are allergic to and take steps to avoid cross-contact. You may want to speak to the manager and the chef, just to be sure.

Remember, never be embarrassed if you feel you are not communicating effectively. If you think a member of the waiting staff does not understand your situation, always trust your instincts and seek out another staff member or manager. Sometimes, the safest choice is to avoid eating and find a safe meal somewhere else.



Resources

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan: foodallergyitalia.org/actionplan/eng, foodallergyitalia.org/actionplan/ita

Epinephrine Auto-Injectors: foodallergyitalia.org/epinephrine

Dining Out: foodallergyitalia.org/for-diners

International Travel Plan: foodallergy.org/travelplan

www.foodallergyitalia.org

