



March 12, 2021

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Hoyer,

We deeply appreciate your support and leadership on asthma and allergy issues, particularly your leadership in securing enactment of the School-Based Allergy and Asthma Management Program Act. I am writing on behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) to urge that you schedule for House floor consideration H.R.1202/S.578, the "Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act of 2021" or the "FASTER Act of 2021."

The bipartisan FASTER Act of 2021 was approved by the Senate on March 3, and represents an agreement reached by the Chair and Ranking Members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. It is also a companion bill to a House measure (H.R. 2117) introduced in the 116th Congress by Representative Doris Matsui and approved by the House on November 17, 2020.

H.R.1202/S. 578 would require the CDC to expand and intensify the collection of information on the prevalence of food allergies for specific allergens in the United States, such as through the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, expand the definition of major allergens to include sesame and would direct the National Institutes of Health to study the economic costs of food allergies in the United States, both individually and for the food allergy population overall.

Sesame is the ninth most common food allergy among American adults and children, ranking just behind the eight allergens for which FDA requires labeling (milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans).¹ A recently published article in JAMA Network confirms that an estimated 1.1 million children and adults in the U.S. have a sesame allergy, underscoring the importance of labeling to help individuals and families safely avoid the allergen.²

Allergic reactions to sesame can be even more severe than reactions to these eight allergens. Among adults with sesame allergies, 32.5 percent report having been to the emergency room (ER) in the past year for an allergic reaction – a higher rate than for any of the eight labeled

¹ Gupta R, Warren C, Blumenstock J, Kotowska J, Mittal K, Smith B. The prevalence of childhood food allergy in the United States: An update. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol* (2017).

² Warren CM, Chadha AS, Sicherer SH, Jiang J, Gupta RS. Prevalence and Severity of Sesame Allergy in the United States. *JAMA Netw Open*. Published online August 02, 2019;2(8):e199144. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.9144



allergens.³ Rates of ER visits are even more common among children with sesame allergies.⁴ The recent JAMA study confirmed that more than a third of adults and children with sesame allergy had experienced severe reactions.⁵

Despite the prevalence and severity of sesame allergy, clear labeling of sesame is not currently required. Sesame can be listed under names that are not easily recognized to consumers, such as “sim sim” or “til; or simply listed as “nature flavors” or “spices” without being named. The absence of a clear label makes it difficult for consumers to identify products that contain sesame, increasing the risk of accidental exposure and allergic reactions.

Aligning sesame labeling requirements with those applied to the top eight allergens would not impose an undue burden on manufacturers. Manufacturers are already familiar with these requirements for the top eight allergens. Moreover, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union require sesame labeling, meaning that multinational manufacturers have already been labeling sesame in other markets.⁶

Considering the prevalence and severity of sesame allergies, we strongly support the FASTER Act and its requirement to label sesame products in a manner similar to the eight currently labeled allergens. Uniform and easily understandable labels will help Americans with sesame allergies and their families safely navigate their food choices and avoid preventable reactions.

Thank you again for your leadership on asthma and allergy issues and we urge you to schedule the FASTER Act for immediate consideration on the House floor.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

³ Letter to Scott Gottlieb from Ruchi S. Gupta, MD. Prevalence Data in Support of 2014 Citizen Petition Regarding Allergen Labeling of Sesame, FDA-2014-P-2035. April 2, 2018. <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FDA-2014-P-2035-0259>.

⁴ Letter to Scott Gottlieb from Ruchi S. Gupta, MD. Prevalence Data in Support of 2014 Citizen Petition Regarding Allergen Labeling of Sesame, FDA-2014-P-2035. April 2, 2018. <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FDA-2014-P-2035-0259>.

⁵ Warren CM, Chadha AS, Sicherer SH, Jiang J, Gupta RS. Prevalence and Severity of Sesame Allergy in the United States. JAMA Netw Open. Published online August 02, 2019;2(8):e199144. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.9144

⁶ “Seeds of Change.” Sarah Sorscher, JD, MPH. Center for Science in the Public Interest. April 2018. <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/seeds-of-change-report.pdf>.