Building a framework to help define tolerable risk in food allergy

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KEY MESSAGES
- Unintended allergen presence in foods poses a risk to people with food allergies
- The rationale and values underlying decisions about what risk is tolerable in food allergy are not clear
- This lack of clarity has hindered definition of appropriate risk benchmarks for food allergens, leaving people with food allergies frustrated and not knowing when to trust that foods are safe for them
- The ILSI-Europe Food Allergy Task Force has assembled an Expert Group to develop a framework to help multiple stakeholders reach consensus on tolerable risk with transparency

Background
- Food allergy is the daily reality for at least 20 million Europeans (more if including their families, colleagues, etc)
- People with food allergy are a well-defined group who need accurate information on food contents to keep themselves safe
- The law protects them well against exposure to allergenic ingredients, but not to unintended allergen presence (UAP)
- Precautionary allergen labelling (PAL) aims to mitigate the risk from UAP, however there are no clear rules on whether and when to use PAL
- There is therefore no general, agreed risk that triggers use of PAL and people with food allergies are left frustrated, confused, and are potentially placed at risk
- Healthcare practitioners are unclear about what advice to give about which foods are safe and which aren’t
- Additionally food businesses face unnecessary uncertainty
- Methods now exist which permit the effective derivation of transparent, risk-based benchmarks, all founded on human data

However, they cannot be effectively implemented without a decision on what risk is tolerable (can be tolerated/accepted)

Why a Framework to Define Tolerable Risk?
- Tolerable risk is the critical link between risk assessment and risk management
- Tolerable risk defines whether risk management objectives are attained
- Defining tolerable risk requires multiple stakeholders to reach valid and equitable conclusions, balancing the interests of all
- Tolerable risk works best when it is transparently defined

References