

5-5-2014

## Food Allergies in Prison

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news\\_rls](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls)

---

### Recommended Citation

"Food Allergies in Prison" (2014). *News Releases*. 2924.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news\\_rls/2924](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/2924)

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlange1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlange1@udayton.edu).

# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Food Allergies in Prison

05.05.2014 | Culture and Society, Students, Faculty, Hot Topics

(Cover photo used under Creative Commons from Justin Gurbisz (url: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jgurbisz/2729450837>) Flickr photostream)

Food allergy policies in America's jails and prisons are woefully inadequate and are a cause for alarm, says a University of Dayton sociologist.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons estimates between 0.2-3.5 percent of all prisoners suffer from food allergies. While that may seem small, overlooking the problem affects as many as 77,000 prisoners, sometimes with life-or-death consequences as in the case of Michael Saffioti, a prisoner in the state of Washington.

Research from assistant sociology professor Jamie Longazel and Rachel Archer, a 2014 University of Dayton graduate, is featured in a recent article in *Prison Legal News*.

"Cost cutting rather than nutritional adequacy seems to be increasingly emphasized in the realm of prison food," they wrote. "The likelihood that prisoners with food allergies have their needs met is thus diminished as they confront not just a set of inadequate policies, but also a system whose main concern is not their health and well-being."

Longazel and Archer share the story of Saffioti, who was arrested on a misdemeanor marijuana charge and held at the Snohomish County Jail in Washington state. Saffioti had a known dairy allergy and raised questions about his breakfast of a pancake and oatmeal. The jail staff removed the pancake and assured him the oatmeal was safe, but after taking just a few bites he experienced shortness of breath.

Saffioti was given an inhaler but was denied a request to see a nurse. After being returned to his cell, he repeatedly asked to see a nurse and jumped up and down seeking assistance. Thirty-five minutes later, a guard found Saffioti unconscious, and after failed attempts at CPR, he was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead.

To raise awareness of the issue, Longazel and Archer examined the food allergy policies used in the prison systems of 39 states (11 states did not respond to their request).

They made three key observations:

- Many policies are lacking. An official in Kansas said they have no procedure in place, and many other states limit the types of allergies they will accommodate.
- Among states that do acknowledge a variety of allergies, prisoners have difficulty becoming eligible for alternative diets. Roadblocks include medical proof (often costly); testing is only allowed when there are visible symptoms; and requiring prisoners to pay for tests that come up negative.
- The burden is often on prisoners to make food choices. This hints at a lack of institutional support and can be difficult for prisoners to make choices about food they did not prepare.

"Our content analysis of prison food allergy policies provides cause for alarm," they wrote. "Granted, it is possible that prison staff go beyond what is listed on policy forms in helping prisoners meet their dietary needs. However, given the conditions of confinement that have characterized our nation's overcrowded prisons in this era of mass imprisonment, we have little reason to be so optimistic."

Longazel is a co-author of *The Pains of Mass Imprisonment* (2013), with Benjamin Fleury-Steiner of the University of Delaware. The book chronicles examples of exploitation, coercion, isolation and brutality throughout America's prison system, which the authors contend is designed primarily for containment and oppression rather than rehabilitation.

**For more information, contact Cameron Fullam, assistant director of media relations, at 937-229-3256 or [fullam@udayton.edu](mailto:fullam@udayton.edu).**