“Does this contain gluten?”

What it means:
The guest wants to know whether the dish includes gluten, which is a protein found in **wheat**, **barley**, **rye**, and **most oats**. Gluten can be present in obvious ingredients (like bread, pasta) or hidden (like in soy sauce, dressings, marinades, seasonings, fried foods).

Why it matters:
- **Celiac disease:** Even tiny amounts can cause serious immune reactions and damage.
- **Sensitivity/Intolerance:** Some guests get sick without having celiac disease.
- **Dietary Choice:** Others may avoid gluten for personal or health reasons.

What staff should do:
- Ask follow up questions. “Do you have an allergy or medical concern?”
- Always check the recipe and ingredient labels.
- Confirm with the chef or kitchen manager when unsure.
- Never guess. It's okay to say, “Let me double-check that for you.”

“Is there a risk of cross-contact with gluten?”

What it means:
The guest is asking if gluten-free foods might touch gluten during prep or cooking, which is a concern for those with celiac disease or severe allergies.

Why it matters:
Many restaurants claim something is “gluten-free” but do not prevent cross-contact. This can be dangerous. Cross-contact makes the meal unsafe, even if the ingredients are gluten-free. Common examples:
- A gluten-free bun grilled on the same surface as regular buns
- Fries cooked in shared oil with breaded foods
- Unclean toasters, cutting boards, or utensils

What staff should do:
- Know and explain your restaurant’s protocols, such as:
    - Separate prep areas, equipment
    - Changing gloves, using clean utensils
    - Clearly alerting the kitchen of allergies or celiac concerns

- Alert the chef or kitchen manager of the concern.
- If your restaurant has no formal protocol, **be honest**, and inform the guest. It’s better to be transparent than to make a claim that isn’t backed up.

Example sources of gluten exposure and cross-contact

Issue	Remedy
🚫 Gluten free items (meat, buns) grilled on the same surface as regular buns	✅ Prepare gluten free items in a separate, clean pan ✅ Use a barrier such as aluminum foil to prevent contact with gluten-containing surfaces ✅ Dedicate a grill to be gluten-free
🚫 Gluten free items fried in shared fryer	✅ Dedicate a fryer for gluten free items only
🚫 Gluten free pasta prepared in shared pasta water with regular pasta	✅ Boil fresh water for gluten free pasta
🚫 Using a pizza cutter on both regular and gluten-free pizza	✅ Use separate tools, serving spoons, pans
🚫 Gluten free dishes prepared in same area	✅ Prepare gluten free foods away from main prep area; use clean cutting boards, strainers, tools, pans, and gloves. ⚠️ Ensure your apron, towel, and gloves are clean!
🚫 Gluten contamination on hands or gloves	✅ Wash your hands with soap and water and change gloves ⚠️ Hand sanitizer does not remove gluten. Gluten is a very sticky molecule, not a germ.
🚫 Something with gluten was accidentally placed on a gluten-free meal (e.g., croutons on a salad)	✅ Remake the meal. If gluten-free food touches gluten containing food, the meal is no longer safe to eat.