



Hon. Marco Mendicino  
Minister of Public Safety  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A6  
Email: [marco.mendicino@parl.gc.ca](mailto:marco.mendicino@parl.gc.ca)

December 7, 2021

Sent via post and email

Dear Minister,

I am writing you today as the president of the Canadian Celiac Association (CCA), a national charity representing the over 320,000 Canadians with or at risk of celiac disease and the estimated 2.5 million with gluten disorders.

For nearly 50 years, the CCA has advocated for patients to have access to safe gluten-free food along with investments in research and education to improve the lives of Canadians living with and at risk for celiac disease and gluten disorders. Celiac disease, one of the most common of all autoimmune diseases, is a life-long genetic condition where an individual's small intestine is damaged by the ingestion of gluten which is a benign protein found in wheat, rye and barley.

It has come to our attention that an Edmonton woman with celiac disease, Ms. Janet Game, went without food for nearly 40 hours as she was asked to quarantine in a Toronto airport hotel after returning from an international destination. She did not have access to medically required gluten-free food.. In addition to the abnormally long periods without food, when the food did arrive, she was unable to eat it as it was either made with gluten-containing ingredients or portions of the food were cross-contaminated. This was despite her best efforts to communicate her medical requirements.

For all people with celiac disease, any food containing gluten in amounts over 20 parts per million, as outlined in the *Safe Foods for Canadians Act*, puts people at risk for illness, facing a myriad of acute short-term symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, headaches, painful skin rashes, joint pain and abdominal cramping, and in some extreme cases, causing the need for hospitalization. Long term impacts can include anemia, osteoporosis, neurological symptoms and some cancers.

The right to safe food is a fundamental human right that is enshrined in a range of international legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. It is more specifically spelled out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Canada signed in 1976.



According to Office of The High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Food must be available, accessible, and adequate.”<sup>1</sup>

- **Availability** – The individual did not have food available for extended periods that she could safely consume. This was despite her offer to order in or arrange for food delivery.
- **Accessibility** includes those who are physically vulnerable, which would seem to extend to those in mandatory quarantine.
- **Adequacy** means foods must meet dietary needs considering a person’s health; in this case, taking into account Ms. Game’s celiac disease.

The CCA has reached out to the Red Cross to offer support from our on-staff dietitian who has expertise with celiac disease to help with the requirements for a gluten-free meal and the necessary preparations to keep the food safe from cross-contamination.

While thankfully Ms. Game’s immediate issue has been rectified, we have been notified of an additional community member and her daughter under quarantine in Toronto at the Radisson Hotel.

**We would like written assurance from you as Minister of Public Safety that Canadians with celiac disease and those with gluten disorders currently under quarantine along with all future occurrences will be assured that they will have access to their medically necessary gluten-free diet, free from cross-contamination and at no additional cost to them to ensure their health will be maintained while under federal government care.**

Please also consider this communication as our offer to support to any federal public agency or institution where food accommodations need to be made under its care for people with celiac disease to ensure the health of vulnerable Canadians is preserved.

If you wish, I would be pleased to speak directly with you and/or your staff further on this matter.

Sincerely,

Janet Bolton

Cc:

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health, [jean-yves.duclos@parl.gc.ca](mailto:jean-yves.duclos@parl.gc.ca)

Iqwinder Gaheer, Member of Parliament for Mississauga-Malton, [iqwinder.gaheer@parl.gc.ca](mailto:iqwinder.gaheer@parl.gc.ca)

Melissa Secord, National Executive Director, [melissa.secord@celiac.ca](mailto:melissa.secord@celiac.ca)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>