

Anaphylaxis and Parent Bodies

What are allergies?

An allergy is when the immune system reacts to substances (allergens) in the environment which are usually harmless (e.g. food proteins, pollen, dust mites).

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe, often rapidly progressive allergic reaction that is potentially life threatening.

What causes anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is most commonly caused by food allergies. Any food can cause an allergic reaction, however nine foods cause 90% of reactions in Australia, these are:

- peanuts
- tree nuts (e.g. hazelnuts, cashews, almonds)
- egg
- cow's milk
- wheat
- soybean
- fish
- shellfish
- sesame.

Other causes of anaphylaxis include:

- insect stings and bites
- medications
- latex.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Mild to moderate allergic reaction

- swelling of lips, face, eyes
- hives or welts
- tingling mouth
- abdominal pain, vomiting (these are signs of a severe allergic reaction to insects).

Anaphylaxis (Severe Allergic Reaction)

- difficult/noisy breathing
- swelling of tongue
- swelling/tightness in throat
- difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- wheeze or persistent cough
- persistent dizziness or collapse
- pale and floppy (young children).

Why is it important to know about anaphylaxis?

Avoidance of known allergens is crucial in the management of anaphylaxis. Schools need to work with parents/guardians and students to minimise exposure to known allergens. Knowledge of severe allergies will assist staff to better understand how to help students who are at risk of anaphylaxis.



How can anaphylaxis be treated?

Adrenaline given as an injection using an autoinjector (such as an EpiPen® or Anapen®) into the outer mid thigh muscle is the most effective first aid treatment for anaphylaxis. Adrenaline autoinjectors are designed so that anyone can use them in an emergency.

Parents/guardians should provide schools with an adrenaline autoinjector and ASCIA Action Plan for the student, which should be stored unlocked and easily accessible to staff. If a student is treated with an adrenaline autoinjector, an ambulance must be called immediately to take the student to a hospital.

How can anaphylaxis be prevented?

The key to the prevention of anaphylaxis is:

- knowledge of students who are at risk,
- awareness of known allergens, and
- prevention of exposure to known allergens.

Some students wear a medical warning bracelet to indicate allergies.

How can parent bodies support anaphylaxis management in schools?

Parent bodies can support the school in allergy and anaphylaxis management by:

- ensuring fundraising activities don't involve food. If conducting a fundraiser which does involve food, liaise with school administration regarding appropriate food choices consistent with the school's anaphylaxis management strategies.
- liaising with school administration regarding appropriate risk minimisation strategies for the school canteen and supporting the school's anaphylaxis management strategies.
- ensuring canteen staff and volunteers are educated about food allergy and how to prevent cross contamination when preparing, storing and serving food.

For more information about food allergy and the school canteen, refer to the fact sheet for Canteens.

Further information:

WA Department of Health
www.health.wa.gov.au/anaphylaxis

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)
www.allergy.org.au

Anaphylaxis Australia
www.allergyfacts.org.au

