

# Anaphylaxis

## 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?

Symptoms of a **mild to moderate** allergic reaction include:

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

Symptoms of **anaphylaxis** (severe allergic reaction) watch for any one of the following:

- difficulty or noisy breathing
- swelling of the tongue
- swelling/tightness in the throat
- difficulty talking and/or a hoarse voice
- wheezing or persistent cough
- loss of consciousness and/or collapse
- young children may appear pale and floppy.



## Why is it important to know about anaphylaxis?

Avoidance of known allergens is crucial in the management of anaphylaxis. Schools and child care services need to work with parents/guardians and children to minimise a child's exposure to known allergens. Knowledge of severe allergies will assist staff to better understand how to help children 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 or child care services with an adrenaline autoinjector and ASCIA Action Plan for their child, which should be stored unlocked and easily accessible to staff. If a child is treated with an adrenaline autoinjector, an ambulance must be called immediately to take the child to a hospital.

## How can anaphylaxis be prevented?

The key to the prevention of anaphylaxis is:

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

Some children wear a medical warning bracelet to indicate allergies.

## Anaphylaxis management in schools or child care services

When a child known to be at risk of anaphylaxis attends a school or child care service, parents/guardians must:

- inform staff of the child's allergies
- discuss risk minimisation strategies with staff
- work with staff to complete an Individual Anaphylaxis Health Care Plan
- provide the school with a copy of the child's ASCIA Action Plan that has been completed by a medical practitioner and has an up-to-date photograph
- supply the child's adrenaline autoinjector and ensure it has not expired

It is recommended that staff involved:

- know the identity of children who are at risk of anaphylaxis
- communicate regularly with parents/guardians
- follow information contained in the child's Individual Anaphylaxis Health Care Plan
- obtain training in how to recognise and respond to an anaphylactic reaction, including administering an adrenaline autoinjector
- ensure the adrenaline autoinjector is stored in an unlocked, easily accessible place
- know where the adrenaline autoinjector is located
- in the event of a reaction, follow the procedures in the child's ASCIA Action Plan

## Further information:

WA Department of Health  
[www.health.wa.gov.au/anaphylaxis](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/anaphylaxis)

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)  
[www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

Anaphylaxis Australia  
[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

