

Information on anaphylaxis for school staff

Purpose of this fact sheet

This fact sheet provides information to staff on what is anaphylaxis: who is at risk, what the signs of anaphylaxis are, and what should be done in the event of this medical emergency.

This fact sheet is appendix 5 of the Policy - Medication to Students: Routine, Emergency and Over the Counter, which contains specific requirements about managing health conditions requiring medication at schools.

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe and sudden allergic reaction. It can occur when a susceptible person is exposed to an allergen (such as a food or insect sting). Although death is rare, an anaphylactic reaction always requires an emergency response. Prompt treatment with injected adrenaline is required to halt progression and can be life saving. Fortunately anaphylactic reactions are usually preventable by implementing strategies for avoiding allergens.

Common allergens that can trigger anaphylaxis are:

- foods (e.g. peanuts and other nuts, shellfish and fish; and in pre-school age children, milk and egg)
- insect stings (e.g. bee, wasp, jack jumper ants)
- medications (e.g. antibiotics, aspirin)
- latex (e.g. rubber gloves, balloons, swimming caps).

The severity of an anaphylactic reaction can be influenced by a number of factors including exercise, hot weather and in the case of food allergens, the amount eaten. In the case of severe food allergies, an anaphylactic reaction is usually triggered by ingestion of the food.

The school can help by assisting the student in the avoidance of allergens and ensuring that an emergency response plan is in place for all activities. The early recognition of the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis may save lives by allowing the earlier administration of first aid and contact of the appropriate emergency medical services.

Who is at risk of anaphylaxis?

Children who are highly allergic to any of the above allergens are at risk of anaphylaxis if exposed. Those who have had a previous anaphylactic reaction are at increased risk.

How can you recognise an anaphylactic reaction?

Reactions usually begin within minutes of exposure and can progress rapidly at any time over a period of two hours. A student at risk of anaphylaxis will often recognise the early symptoms of an allergic reaction before any other signs are observable. Common symptoms are:

- flushing and/or swelling of the face
- itching and/or swelling of the lips, tongue or mouth
- itching and/or a sense of tightness in the throat, hoarseness, difficulty breathing and/or swallowing
- hives, itchy rash and/or swelling about the face, body or extremities
- nausea, abdominal cramps, vomiting
- shortness of breath, repetitive coughing and/or wheezing

- faint, rapid pulse, low blood pressure
- light headedness, feeling faint, collapse
- distress, anxiety and a sense of dread.

Staff responsibility in an emergency

In an emergency, all staff have a duty of care. Staff are to use common sense which dictates that, while they should not act beyond their capabilities, they are expected to do as much as they can to take appropriate action.

What should I do?

The student's individual health care plan will spell out what needs to be done. It includes an emergency response plan (Appendix 8) detailing how to deal with a reaction should it occur.

Appendix 8 also details how to use an EpiPen in an emergency. If your school has a student at risk of anaphylaxis the emergency response plan should be posted in suitable locations for easy reference as agreed by the parent and where appropriate, the student.

Early recognition of symptoms and immediate treatment could save a child's life.

Training in the management of anaphylaxis

The principal will inform staff about anaphylaxis using this fact sheet and advise them of relevant details of the individual student's severe allergy. Training will need to be arranged for staff, including the use of an EpiPen.