

Anaphylaxis Factsheet

adapted from Factsheet: anaphylaxis - managing anaphylaxis in Victorian Government Schools

What are allergies?

Allergies occur when the immune system produces antibodies against substances in the environment (allergens) that are usually harmless. Once allergy has developed, exposure to the particular allergen can result in symptoms that vary from mild to life threatening (anaphylaxis).

What is anaphylaxis?

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

Although allergic reactions are common in children, severe life threatening reactions are uncommon and deaths are rare. However, deaths have occurred and anaphylaxis must therefore be regarded as a medical emergency.

What are the main causes?

Food allergies are the most common triggers for an anaphylactic reaction. Common causes of anaphylaxis in Australia include: peanuts; tree nuts; egg; cow's milk; wheat; soybean; fish and shellfish; insect stings; medications; latex; anaesthesia.

Signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis

The symptoms of a **mild to moderate allergic reaction** can include: swelling of the lips, face and eyes; hives or welts; abdominal pain and/or vomiting.

Symptoms of **anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction)** can include: difficulty breathing or noisy breathing; swelling of the tongue; swelling/tightness in the throat; difficulty talking and/or a hoarse voice; wheezing or persistent coughing; loss of consciousness and/or collapse; young children may appear pale and floppy.

How can anaphylaxis be treated?

Adrenaline given as an injection into the muscle of the outer mid-thigh is the most effective first aid treatment for anaphylaxis. Children at risk of recurrent anaphylaxis are advised by their medical practitioners to carry adrenaline in an auto-injector, e.g. EpiPen, for administration in an emergency. Children under 20kg are prescribed an EpiPen Junior, which has a smaller dosage of adrenaline.

How can anaphylaxis be prevented?

The key to prevention of anaphylaxis in schools is knowledge of those students who are at risk, awareness of triggers (allergens) and prevention of exposure to these triggers.