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When Your Child Has Anaphylaxis

Certain foods, bee stings, and some medications can cause allergic reactions in children who are sensitive to them. Anaphylaxis is the most severe type of allergic reaction. It may occur from a few minutes to an hour or two after contact with an allergen (a substance to which someone is allergic). Anaphylaxis can cause the airways to swell, making it hard to breathe. It also may cause a sudden drop in blood pressure. That means less oxygen reaches your child's brain and other vital organs. Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency—it can be fatal if not treated quickly.

What Causes Anaphylaxis?

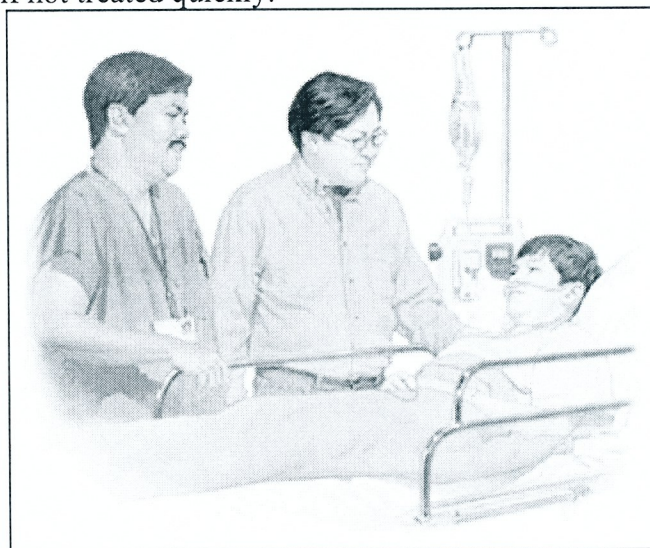
Children can react to many substances, but some of the most common allergens include:

- Foods, especially peanuts, shellfish, and tree nuts (such as almonds, cashews, and walnuts)
- Insect bites and stings
- Medications such as antibiotics
- Latex, a type of rubber
- Allergy shots

What Are the Symptoms of Anaphylaxis?

In an allergic reaction, the immune system mistakes a substance as harmful and floods the whole body with powerful chemicals. These chemicals can cause symptoms such as:

- Itching skin and hives (raised bumps on the skin)
- Swelling of the mouth or face
- Trouble breathing, cough, wheezing, or trouble swallowing
- Lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Stomach pain or cramping
- Confusion, slurred speech
- Anxiety (feeling of doom)



After an anaphylactic reaction is treated, your child will stay in the hospital for a few hours or overnight for observation.

If Your Child Has Symptoms of Anaphylaxis, Act Quickly!

If your doctor has prescribed an injectable epinephrine (such as EpiPen), use it right away. Then call 911 or emergency services.

How Is Anaphylaxis Treated?

In the hospital:

- Your child is likely to be given epinephrine (adrenaline) and antihistamines to help stop the allergic response.
- The doctor will ask about substances your child may have been exposed to and whether a similar

reaction has occurred before. Certain tests may also be done.

- Your child will be observed for a few hours or overnight to make sure symptoms don't return.
- Your child will be referred to his or her doctor or an allergist (a doctor who specializes in allergies) for follow-up care.

Using Injectable Epinephrine

To treat a future attack, the doctor will prescribe injectable epinephrine. This is epinephrine in a form you or your child can use. It is a pen with a hidden needle that's released by a spring. Here is how to use one type of injectable epinephrine called the EpiPen (your doctor or pharmacist can tell you about other types):

- Grasp the pen in the middle, not on the end.
- Snap off the safety cap.
- Point the tip of the pen anywhere on the outside of your child's thigh.
- Push the pen into the thigh. Wait to hear a click, and then hold for 8 seconds to release the epinephrine.
- As soon as you've given the shot, call 911.
- Have your child lie down with legs raised or a pillow under the knees until help arrives.
- Teach older children how and when to use the EpiPen themselves.

Preventing Anaphylaxis

To help prevent allergic reactions:

- For food allergies: Read package labels carefully, use caution in restaurants, and explain your child's allergy to teachers, caregivers, and other parents.
- For bee or wasp allergies: Have your child wear long sleeves, long pants, and shoes outdoors. Avoid clothing your child in flowery patterns or bright colors. Strong smells can attract bees, so avoid perfume, cologne, or highly scented laundry soaps. Use caution in fields, gardens, picnic areas, and around garbage cans.
- Tell your child's doctor, dentist, and pharmacist of any allergies your child has to medications. Keep a list of alternate medications handy.

Keeping Your Child Safe in an Emergency

These precautions can help ensure your child's safety in an emergency:

- Inform key people about your child's allergy. This includes adults who spend time with your child, such as childcare providers, teachers, and other parents. Let them know the warning signs of an allergic reaction and what to do if it occurs. Teach them how to use injectable epinephrine.
- Prepare an action plan. Describe how to care for your child in case of an allergic reaction. Give a copy of the plan to the school nurse, food service workers, and people who care for your child.
- Have your child wear a medical alert bracelet. This explains your child's allergy to anyone who comes to your child's aid. You can buy the bracelet in most drugstores and on the Internet.
- Have more than one dose of injectable epinephrine on hand. Keep one at your child's school or daycare center, and at least one in a safe place at home. Also have one for you or your child to carry. Be sure to replace any unused injectable epinephrine once a year.

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