

Being an allergy-aware school

Allergies occur when the immune system reacts to substances that are usually harmless. Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and can be life threatening. For people at risk, anaphylaxis occurs quickly after contact to the food, insect or medicine to which the person is allergic.

It is very important that people at risk of anaphylaxis avoid *any contact* with the trigger (allergen). This is especially important with food allergy – a severe reaction can occur if the allergic person comes into contact with even a tiny amount of the food.

Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency. And staff at school have gone through training to recognise reactions, and to respond quickly. Parents of these children have already liaised with staff on the suitable health plan for their child.

So... what can children and parents do to support those with severe allergies at school?

- Find out if there is someone with severe allergies in the classroom. Then consider alternatives to include that child. Ask the child what food they can have for birthday celebrations or distribute non-food treats, like stickers.
- Discourage children from sharing food and drinks. This also includes cups, drink bottles and utensils.
- Wash hands before and after eating – good hygiene as well as reducing chance of cross-contamination.
- Washing hands after eating reduces likelihood of food ending up on school toys and equipment.
- All food products must list common allergens. If a product states 'may contain xxx' – it could have this allergen and must not be given to that child who is allergic. Specific permission from that child's parent must be given.
- Educate your child about other children with allergies and why it is important to practice the above strategies.
- Talk to the school about how children can let a teacher know quickly if anaphylaxis is happening, so teachers can administer first aid immediately.

What are the signs of Anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction which can be life-threatening. It causes closure of the airway and/or a drop in blood pressure. Look for one or more of the following;

- Difficult or noisy breathing
- Swelling of the tongue
- Swelling or tightness of the throat
- Wheezing or a persistent cough
- Difficult talking and/or a hoarse voice
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (especially in young children)
- Abdominal pain or vomiting (if following an insect bite or sting)

It is important to lie the person flat and get help fast.

Do you want more information?

There are some great resources out there. Here are a few websites;

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy www.allergy.org.au
- Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia www.allergyfacts.org.au
- Western Australian Department of Health www.health.wa.gov.au/anaphylaxis

Belinda Laing-Hughes
Community Nurse for Mt. Pleasant Primary School
Child and Adolescent Health Service
Ph: 9339 1362