

# Anaphylaxis

The word Anaphylaxis, is derived from the Greek words ana - (against) and - phylaxis (protection). Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can occur when the body comes into contact with a substance (called an 'allergen') to which it is allergic. Anaphylaxis can be life-threatening and should always be considered a medical emergency. Common causes of anaphylaxis include insect venom (wasp, bee, hornet, fire ant), food (peanut, tree nut, egg, cow's milk, wheat, fish, shellfish, soy and sesame).

## Signs and Symptoms:

Anaphylaxis can affect multiple organ systems including respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and cutaneous (skin) systems. As a result, a variety of symptoms may be experienced. The signs and symptoms as stated on the ASCIA Action Plan are as follows:

### Mild to moderate

- Swelling of lips, face, eyes
- Hives or welts
- Tingling mouth
- Abdominal pain, vomiting (these are signs of anaphylaxis for insect allergy)

### Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction)

- Difficult/noisy breathing
- Swelling of tongue
- Swelling/tightness in throat
- Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Pale and floppy (young children)

Symptoms usually begin within 5-30 minutes from the time of exposure but may occur hours later (usually within 2 hours).

## Treatment:

An anaphylactic reaction is a life-threatening allergic reaction and should be considered a medical emergency, call 000.

Treatment requires an injection of adrenaline. A patient with a history of anaphylaxis may carry an adrenaline autoinjector device called an 'EpiPen' or 'Anapen' and an ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis with them. Adrenaline autoinjectors are pre-loaded syringes that inject a single dose of adrenaline. This should be administered whilst the ambulance is on its way.

- [ASCIA Action plans, treatment plans and checklist for anaphylaxis and allergic reactions](https://allergy.org.au/hp/ascia-plans-action-and-treatment/) (<https://allergy.org.au/hp/ascia-plans-action-and-treatment/>)
- [How to give Epipen](https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/how-to-give-epipen/) (<https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/how-to-give-epipen/>)
- [Anaphylaxis resources](https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/) (<https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/>)

## Prevention:

In order to prevent future allergic reactions, avoidance of the particular allergen is recommended. Allergy testing may be performed by a clinical immunology/allergy specialist, to identify the allergen/s causing anaphylaxis. For insect allergy, some people may be able to undergo allergen immunotherapy treatment (commonly known as 'desensitisation'), which can reduce the risk of future anaphylactic reactions. There is currently no cure for food allergy and avoidance of known food allergens is essential.

Close friends, family, work colleagues and school teachers should be made aware of any allergies. This may allow them to identify and respond to early signs of anaphylaxis, as well as assist in the avoidance of known. A medical information bracelet may also be worn to alert bystanders, should an anaphylactic reaction be experienced in a public location.

## Other resources:

[Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergies Resources](https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/) (<https://allergy.org.au/hp/anaphylaxis/>)

[Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/) (<http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/>)

[Anaphylaxis guidelines for Queensland state schools](https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/anaphylaxis-guidelines-for-queensland-state-schools.pdf#search=anaphylaxis%20guidelines%20for%20schools)

(<https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/anaphylaxis-guidelines-for-queensland-state-schools.pdf#search=anaphylaxis%20guidelines%20for%20schools>)

[Medscape](http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/135065-overview) (<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/135065-overview>)

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/1/25/5/anaphylaxis>

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**Help and assistance:**

Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency please call 000 immediately.

If you have any other symptoms suggesting an allergic reaction or concerns about allergies please contact one of our Registered Nurses at 13 HEALTH by phoning 13 43 25 84.