

Children's Emergency Department

Allergic reaction and anaphylaxis



An allergic reaction happens when your body's natural defences (immune system) reacts to something in the environment. The reaction is to something that is usually harmless like food, pollen, or animal fur.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction may be localised or generalised and range from mild to severe.

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of an allergic reaction. Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening medical emergency.

The most common causes of allergy and anaphylaxis in young children are eggs, peanuts and nuts, cow's milk, soy, wheat, fish, and shellfish. Other causes are bee and insect bites, some medicines (antibiotics, aspirin) and latex (rubber gloves, swimming hats).

A reaction can develop within minutes of exposure to the allergen.

Symptoms of a mild to moderate allergic reaction include:

- Itching
- Skin hives- Itchy, raised rings or patches that appear anywhere on the body and last minutes to hours
- Tingling in and/or around the mouth
- Tummy (abdominal) pain
- Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- Face and eyelid swelling



Anaphylaxis and severe allergic reactions affect the whole body.

Symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Tightness in the chest or throat
- Swelling of the mouth, face, tongue, lips, or throat
- Difficulty swallowing or speaking
- Harsh noise as they breathe in (stridor)
- Wheezing and persistent coughing
- Dizziness, fainting episode, or collapse
- A baby or toddler that becomes pale or floppy

What should I do if my child has an allergic reaction?

Give Chlorphenamine Maleate (Piriton) immediately. Remove the allergen and monitor for any further reactions.

You can buy Piriton from a pharmacy or supermarket. Follow the dose instructions on the box.

What should I do if my child has anaphylaxis?

- Immediately administer the EpiPen if your child has been given one.
- Call 999
- Lie your child on the floor with their legs raised.
- If they have been stung by an insect, try to remove the sting if it's still in the skin.
- If their symptoms have not improved after 5 minutes, use a 2nd EpiPen
- Do not let them stand or walk at any time even if they feel better.

What can I do to prevent another allergic/anaphylaxis reaction?

- If you can identify the cause, avoid contact with the allergen.
- Inform your child's school, nursery and any other carers about the allergy, its symptoms and avoidance.
- Food allergies – Check food labels and restaurant menus carefully to make sure they don't contain the food your child is allergic to. Do not allow your child to share food with other children. Your child should only eat food provided from home or given with your permission.
- Ensure your child always washes their hands after playing and before eating.
- Ensure you always have cetirizine or Piriton available in your home and with you.
- If an EpiPen has been prescribed, ensure your child always carries it.
- Make sure your child's carers/teachers know about the EpiPen and are trained to use it.
- If your child suffers from anaphylaxis or severe allergic reactions, then ensure your child wears a Medic Alert bracelet.
 - Visit www.medicalert.org.uk

For further advice and information:

- Call NHS 111 (24 hours a day)
- Contact your GP

Children's Emergency Department

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Patient Information

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