

# Epinephrine: Life-saving medication for severe allergic reactions



## ? WHAT IS epinephrine?

Epinephrine is the first-line treatment for a severe allergic reaction (also known as anaphylaxis) and should be used promptly. It helps reverse life-threatening respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms by opening the airways and improving blood pressure.

**It is the only treatment shown to stop an anaphylactic reaction.**

Antihistamines and asthma medications should not be used instead of epinephrine for treating anaphylaxis. They can be administered after epinephrine has been given.

## HOW IS epinephrine used?

Epinephrine can be administered through an auto-injector (e.g. EpiPen®). The epinephrine auto-injector should be injected into the muscle of the mid-outer thigh to release the medication and can be given through clothing, if necessary. There is only one dose in an epinephrine auto-injector.

**A common mistake with anaphylactic reactions is waiting too long to give epinephrine. Epinephrine is safe to use, and it can save a life. Don't hesitate.**

## ✓ TIPS ABOUT epinephrine auto-injectors

**Carry it.** No matter where you go, your epinephrine auto-injector should be with you.

**Ensure others know you need it.** Wear medical jewellery (e.g., MedicAlert®) that lists your allergy and need for epinephrine.

**Keep it up-to-date.** Make sure it's not expired. Set your own reminders to check the date on the device, or sign-up for a free email reminder at [epipen.ca](http://epipen.ca).

**Take care of it.** Epinephrine can lose its effectiveness when stored in extreme heat or cold. Never leave it in a car's glove box or in the fridge/freezer where it can get too hot or too cold. In summer, don't leave it in the hot sun. For winter, carry it in an inside coat pocket.

**Practice with a trainer.** Order a free EpiPen training device from [epipen.ca](http://epipen.ca), it contains no needle or drug.

**Know about body position.** When giving epinephrine, it is recommended to have the person SIT or LIE DOWN, depending on the symptoms. Visit [foodallergycanada.ca](http://foodallergycanada.ca) for more details about the different body positions to consider.

**Use it.** The auto-injector is safe, easy to use, and it may save a life. The risk of not giving it far outweighs the potential side effects of the medication (e.g., rapid heart rate, dizziness, headache).

**Educate others.** Teach friends, family, co-workers, babysitters, teachers — anyone who needs to know — when and how to use it, and where you keep it.

# Follow these 5 emergency steps

It's critical to respond quickly and appropriately in the event of an anaphylactic reaction.



1. Use an **epinephrine auto-injector** (e.g., EpiPen) at the **first sign** of a known or suspected allergic reaction.



2. Call **9-1-1** or local emergency medical services. Tell them someone is having a life-threatening allergic reaction.



3. Give a **second dose of epinephrine** as early as 5 minutes after the first dose if there is no improvement in symptoms.



EMERGENCY

4. Go to the **nearest hospital immediately (ideally by ambulance)**, even if symptoms are mild or have stopped.

The reaction could worsen or come back, even after proper treatment. Stay in the hospital for an appropriate period of observation as decided by the emergency department physician (generally about 4-6 hours).



5. Call the **emergency contact person** (e.g., parent, guardian, spouse).

Visit [foodallergyca.ca](http://foodallergyca.ca) or call **1 866 785-5660** for more information and support.