

Anaphylaxis

What is Anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis (pronounced anna-fill-axis) is the most serious type of allergic reaction.

Symptoms of Anaphylaxis

Symptoms can vary for different people, and can be different from one reaction to the next.

- **Skin:** hives, swelling, itching, warmth, redness, rash
- **Breathing (respiratory):** coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain/tightness, throat tightness/swelling, hoarse voice, nasal congestion or hay fever-like symptoms (runny nose and watery eyes, sneezing), trouble swallowing
- **Stomach (gastrointestinal):** nausea, pain/cramps, vomiting, diarrhea
- **Heart (cardiovascular):** pale/blue colour, weak pulse, passing out, dizzy/lightheaded, shock
- **Other:** anxiety, feeling of “impending doom”, headache, uterine cramps, metallic taste in mouth

During anaphylaxis, a person may have trouble breathing or experience a drop in blood pressure. These symptoms can lead to death if not treated.

When in Doubt, Inject.

Epinephrine is the drug used to treat anaphylaxis. It has saved countless lives. Epinephrine is the first line of defence during a reaction. It is not safe to wait for emergency medical personnel or a doctor to give the injection, or to use other drugs (like antihistamines or asthma medications) instead of epinephrine. There are two epinephrine auto-injectors available in Canada: EpiPen®.

Epinephrine is life-saving medication. Don't be afraid to use it.

Kids and Anaphylaxis

Children will often describe their symptoms differently than an adult would. For example, a child might say “My tongue is fuzzy” or “My throat feels funny”. A very small child may simply become very quiet, because they don’t understand what is happening. As a parent or caregiver, if something seems wrong, check for signs, ask questions and take action at the early signs of a reaction.

How Is Anaphylaxis Treated?

The 5 Emergency Steps

- 1.** Give epinephrine (e.g. EpiPen®) at the first signs of an allergic reaction.
- 2.** Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency medical services and tell them that someone is having an anaphylactic reaction.
- 3.** You can give a second dose of epinephrine as early as 5 minutes after the first dose if there is no improvement in symptoms.
- 4.** Go to the nearest hospital right away (ideally by ambulance), even if symptoms are mild or have stopped. The reaction could get worse or come back after using epinephrine. You should stay in the hospital to be observed (generally about 4 hours).
- 5.** Call the emergency contact person (e.g., parent, guardian, spouse).