

Allergic Reaction, Severe (Anaphylactic Reaction)

What is a severe allergic reaction?

A severe allergic reaction is called an anaphylactic reaction. It is an immediate, severe reaction to a bee sting, drug, food, or other item. The symptoms begin within 30 to 60 minutes and are:

wheezing, croupy cough, or trouble breathing
tightness in the chest or throat (voice may become hoarse)
dizziness or passing out (skin may get bluish)
swelling of lips, tongue, or throat
widespread hives, swelling, or itching. (If these symptoms occur without the symptoms listed above, your child is probably not having an anaphylactic reaction. However, hives, swelling, or itching often occur with other serious symptoms when a child has a severe allergic reaction.)
vomiting, diarrhea, or stomach cramps.

What should I do if my child has a severe allergic reaction?

1. **Call 911 IMMEDIATELY.** Call the rescue squad (911) if your child is having trouble breathing or passes out. Have your child lie down with the feet elevated to prevent shock.
2. **Give epinephrine** If you have an emergency kit with prescription epinephrine (such as EpiPen), give a shot of it to your child immediately. It can save your child's life. Inject it into the muscle or fat layer of the outer part of the upper thigh. Don't hesitate to give epinephrine. If there is any possibility your child is having symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction, give the epinephrine immediately. In addition, if your child had a life-threatening reaction in the past and now has been re-exposed to the same allergic substance (for example, food, or bee sting), give the epinephrine **BEFORE** your child develops symptoms. Epinephrine will not hurt your child even if he is not having an allergic reaction and it could save his or her life.
3. **Give an antihistamine** If you have Benadryl at home, give it. If not, check if you have another antihistamine or cold medicine that has any antihistamine in it. If you do, give one dose immediately in addition to the shot of epinephrine.
4. **Treat stings** If a bee stinger is left in the skin, remove it. Do this by scraping the stinger off with a knife blade or credit card rather than by squeezing it. If your child stops breathing, start CPR.

What can I do to prevent an allergic reaction?

The only way to prevent a reaction is to AVOID contact with the food, drug, or other item causing the problem. It is very important to learn to read food labels.

All children with anaphylactic reactions need to be evaluated later by an allergist. For bee sting reactions, desensitization is helpful. Since the reactions can be fatal, you should keep emergency kits containing epinephrine at home, school, and in a backpack (or fanny pack). You will need a prescription. The allergist or your child's usual healthcare provider may prescribe epinephrine. In case of a severe reaction, epinephrine is need immediately.

Educate others about your child's allergy (what your child needs to avoid, the symptoms of a reaction, and what to do if the child has a reaction). Tell all pharmacists, healthcare providers, and dentists who treat your child about any allergies he has. Some medicines contain ingredients that may cause an allergic reaction.

Also, your child should have a medical ID necklace or bracelet that tells the insect, drug, or food allergy. Some ID necklaces and bracelets can be found in pharmacies.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

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