

Allergies and anaphylaxis for school staff

What is an allergy?

An allergy is when someone's body reacts to something that's normally harmless.

Things that could trigger a reaction include:

- Foods
- Pollens
- Animals
- Insect stings
- Medicines
- Latex (rubber)

Reactions can be mild, but for some people they can be severe. A severe allergic reaction is known as **anaphylaxis**. The most common causes of anaphylaxis are **foods, insect stings, medicines and latex**.

Allergies are usually lifelong conditions and can't be cured. But they can be managed by avoiding triggers and using medication to control reactions.

Types of allergy

It's also important to be aware that many children experience other forms of allergy that require different support, such as:

- **Hay fever** – an allergic reaction to pollen that causes itchy eyes and a runny nose
- **Skin allergies** – itchy skin caused by direct contact with an allergen
- **Asthma** – a long-term condition that causes difficulty breathing, which can be mild or severe and potentially life-threatening

Other food-related conditions, such as food intolerance and coeliac disease, are not allergies and **do not** cause anaphylaxis.

Identifying food allergens

Always check food labels. Anything marked clearly or emphasised in some way (e.g. in bold or capital letters, or in a different colour), is 1 of the **14 common food allergens**. You might also see 'may contain [allergen]', which means the manufacturer can't guarantee there's no risk of cross-contamination with an allergen.

Some children might be allergic to foods not included in the list of 14 common allergens – e.g. peas, lentils and certain fruits. You'll need to pay extra attention to food labels in these cases, and check packaging carefully.

Preventing allergic reactions

Your school should have an up-to-date allergy register including all pupils with allergies.

You should NOT stop pupils taking part in activities to prevent them from coming into contact with allergens.

Severe allergies can be treated as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, so excluding pupils would be against the law. Instead, make activities as safe as possible for pupils with allergies, e.g. use alternative ingredients or materials that can be used by the whole class.

Your school should also have policies and procedures in place to reduce the risks for pupils with allergies.

Signs of a mild or moderate allergic reaction

A mild or moderate allergic reaction might include 1 or more of the following:

- Swollen lips, face or eyes
- Itchy or tingling mouth
- Itchy, raised skin rash (hives)
- Abdominal pain or vomiting



Allergies and anaphylaxis for school staff

Responding to a mild or moderate allergic reaction

Mild allergic reactions can usually be treated with medications known as antihistamines.

If the pupil has a **known allergy and a personal allergy action plan**:

- Locate adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs), just in case symptoms become more severe
- Give antihistamines according to the pupil's personal allergy action plan
- Phone the child's parents/carers or their emergency contact

If a child is **experiencing a reaction for the first time**, you'll need to:

- Stay with the child
- Monitor their symptoms
- Contact their parents/carers or emergency contact. Ask them to seek medical advice

Signs of anaphylaxis

Look for 1 or more of the **ABC** symptoms:

- **Airway:** persistent cough, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing, swollen tongue or throat, tightness in throat
- **Breathing:** difficult or noisy breathing or breathing very fast (as if choking or gasping for air), wheezing or persistent coughing
- **Consciousness/circulation:** feeling faint or dizzy, becoming pale, limp or floppy, feeling sleepy, fainting or collapsing or becoming unconscious

Anaphylaxis commonly occurs together with milder symptoms.

Responding to anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is always a medical emergency.

It needs to be treated in hospital immediately – any delay increases the chances of serious long-term and potentially fatal consequences.

If ANY of the ABC symptoms appear, follow these steps immediately:

1. Lie the child flat, with their legs raised – you can put their feet on a chair to do this more easily
2. Use an AAI to give adrenaline without delay
3. Dial 999 to request an ambulance and say 'anaphylaxis'

If the child is having difficulty breathing, allow them to sit up on the floor with legs outstretched to make breathing easier.

Always give adrenaline if any signs of anaphylaxis are present. If in doubt, give adrenaline. In an emergency, anyone can use an AAI to save a life.

After giving adrenaline:

- Stay with the child until the ambulance arrives
- Keep the child lying down with their legs raised, even if symptoms improve. Do NOT stand them up – standing someone up in anaphylaxis can trigger cardiac arrest
- Phone the child's parents/carers or emergency contact

If there's no improvement after 5 minutes, give a further dose of adrenaline using a second AAI.

Make a second call to the emergency services to confirm that an ambulance has been dispatched.

Commence CPR at any time if there are no signs of life.

