

Emergency Services

Allergic Reaction

Allergic reactions occur when you come in contact with something your body is sensitive to. Allergic reactions can be caused by food, drugs, infections, insect bites, animals, things you breathe and skin contact with irritants such as cosmetics or soaps.

When a person has a severe reaction, it is called 'anaphylaxis' (sounds like anna-fuh-lak-sis). In some cases, anaphylaxis can cause death.

What to watch for

You can have an allergic reaction to something you have used in the past, and not reacted to previously. Once you have had a reaction to something, you will likely react to it again when exposed.

Allergic reactions can be mild to severe. Most people react within 30 minutes of exposure to whatever causes the reaction.

You might notice these signs of a possible allergic reaction:

- rash
- hives (raised itchy red rash)
- swelling of the lips, tongue, throat, eyelids, and ears
- trouble breathing
- tight feeling in the chest
- really dizzy, light-headed, or feel faint

When to call 9-1-1 right away

If any of the following happen after you have been exposed to the substance that caused a reaction in the past:

- You have trouble breathing or become very wheezy.
- You are suddenly light-headed.
- You are wheezing or have a tight feeling in your chest or throat.
- Your mouth, throat, or tongue becomes swollen.

How to take care of yourself at home

Rest for the next 12 to 24 hours.

You can continue to have hives, swelling, or itching over your chest, legs, and/or arms over the next few days. The hives can come and go during this time.

For rashes or hives, to relieve itching:

- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Place a cool wet cloth on your skin.
- Take the medicines suggested by the Emergency doctor.

If your rash lasts more than a few days, arrange to see your family doctor as soon as you can.

Stay away from whatever caused your reaction.

(more on the next page)

Allergic Reaction - *continued*

How to take care of yourself at home

- If you had a severe allergic reaction:
 - Get someone to stay with you for the next 24 hours in case your symptoms return.
- If you are given or told to take anti-histamines:
 - **Do not** drive or do anything that requires your full attention. Anti-histamines can make you feel sleepy.
- Even if you feel you have totally recovered, arrange to see your family doctor within the next week.

To prevent an allergic reaction

- Try not to expose yourself to whatever caused your reaction.
- If you are not sure what caused the reaction, keep a list of activities, foods eaten, or exposures to things in your environment. Take note of any symptoms you have.
- Check with your family doctor before taking any new medicines including herbal medicines, supplements, and vitamins.
- Make yourself an allergy kit containing medicine, lotions, or other items to treat your reaction.

- If you had a severe allergic reaction:
 - Work with your family doctor to create a plan for actions you and others near you must take if you have a reaction. Make sure everyone knows the plan.
 - Talk to your doctor about getting a prescription for an anaphylaxis kit (such as an Epi-pen).
 - Wear a Medical Alert tag.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Your pharmacist
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at www.HealthLinkBC.ca.