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Anaphylaxis in Schools – We all Have a Part to Play!

Anaphylaxis, the most serious type of allergic reaction, can be caused by food, insect stings and a variety of other triggers. Symptoms can vary but often happen very quickly and can be life-threatening if not treated promptly. Possible symptoms include: itching, redness and swelling of the face; trouble breathing, swallowing and speaking; stomach pain, vomiting and diarrhea; hives, rash, weakness, paleness, a sense of doom and loss of consciousness. The most dangerous of these symptoms are breathing difficulties and severe drops in blood pressure. These can be effectively managed with immediate administration of a medication called epinephrine and follow up emergency medical care.

Increasing frequency and severity of allergy is a growing public health issue as we strive to create healthy, safe environments for learning, working and playing in. It is estimated that 300 000 Canadian children have allergies to one or more foods. Food allergies are the leading cause of all anaphylactic reactions and associated fatalities.

We all have a role to play in ensuring our schools are as safe as possible for all of our children. Students with anaphylactic allergies are responsible for carrying their treatment medication with them at all times, wearing their MedicAlert identification, being aware of and avoiding their allergen(s) and telling others (teachers, classmates, coaches etc.) about their allergy. Parents of allergic students are responsible to ensure school staff is aware of their child's allergy and to provide up-to-date treatment plans, medications and contact information. School community members are responsible to help protect allergic student and to create safer environments by knowing who is at risk, finding ways to reduce risk and respecting allergy-safe policies. Anyone working with people who have anaphylactic reactions should be aware of and able to execute the emergency plan including administration of epinephrine and activation of emergency medical services. School nurses are available to offer in-servicing to school staff members and volunteers on anaphylaxis and use of epinephrine auto-injectors.

For more information please visit the Anaphylaxis Canada website at www.anaphylaxis.ca or contact your school public health nurse at (403) 932-8700.