Severe Allergic Reaction
(Anaphylaxis)

**ANAPHYLAXIS** is a sudden, severe allergic reaction that involves various body systems simultaneously (respiratory, cardiovascular, digestive and skin/mucus membranes). Foods, insects, stings or bites, medications and latex are all common causes of an anaphylactic reaction.

What is an allergy? It’s an acquired over-response by the body to a substance that does not normally cause a reaction in most people.

What causes an allergic reaction? The body uses its natural defenses in an attempt to “control” the substance. This natural defense causes the body to release large amounts of histamines. Too many histamines make different body systems react negatively.

What substances cause allergic reactions? Some are more common but any substance can cause an allergic reaction in an at risk person.

How does someone develop an allergic reaction? An allergic reaction only occurs after at least an initial exposure. It can also occur after being exposed to a substance many times; then an allergic reaction develops. Some people are prone to allergies, based on genetics or family history.

Are there different types of allergic reaction? Reactions range from mild to severe:

- **Mild:** generally causes annoying symptoms such as swelling confined to a small area (like a sting), sneezing or watery eyes (such as hay fever).
- **Moderate:** may include the above symptoms plus itching and hives; a doctor may order treatment, such as antihistamines or anti-itching cream.
- **Severe:** the symptoms described on reverse side of this handout; quickly become life threatening and need immediate emergency medications & help.

Can allergic reactions change over time? Yes! Severe allergic reactions especially tend to get worse with each exposure.

What are the most common things that cause severe allergies? These things can even be harmful when “hidden” or combined with other things

- **FOODS:** Peanuts, nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, fish, shellfish and soy; less commonly, just about any other foods
- **INSECTS:** In particular bees, wasps, “yellow jackets” and ants (especially fire ants)
- **MEDICATIONS:** Especially antibiotics such as penicillin and pain medications like codeine and ibuprofen
- **LATEX:** Natural “rubber” products; products containing latex; often found combined in wide variety of items & forms; also some associated foods

How are severe allergic reactions treated? Once a person is diagnosed with a severe allergy, a medical treatment plan is prescribed. This frequently includes EpiPen® (emergency adrenaline), antihistamines and other medications. Sometimes allergy desensitization shots can help but many allergies, such as to foods and latex, can’t be helped with allergy shots. **The best treatment for severe allergies: prevention & quick intervention!!!**

How can I help prevent a severe allergic reaction from recurring? Consider the following:

1. Limit, avoid or eliminate exposing an allergic person to their allergy-causing substances; look around, think ahead and make changes when possible!
2. Post signs alerting & reminding others about a known severe allergy; suggest for the student wear a Medic Alert® tag.
3. Send home a letter requesting that certain things not be brought to or shared at school. (The specific student should not be named.)
4. Notify the nurse consultant so that an individualized health plan can be developed. Arrange for readily available emergency medications.
5. Make sure necessary staff is aware of the student’s allergy, emergency medications & health plan.
6. Don’t forget to take health plan & medications on field trips!
7. Allow older and/or responsible students to possibly carry their own EpiPen®; keep an additional one stored with other medications.
8. Educate students & staff about the importance to eliminate or reduce exposures-- to respect & help protect other’s health & safety.
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Common Warning Signs & Symptoms

✓ Complaint of tingling, itching or metallic taste in mouth
✓ Hives
✓ Difficulty breathing
✓ Swelling and/or itching of mouth and/or throat area
✓ Diarrhea
✓ Vomiting
✓ Cramps and stomach pain
✓ Paleness (from drop in blood pressure)
✓ Loss of consciousness

If you see someone showing any of these symptoms, ACT FAST!!!

** Follow health care action plan

** Administer prescribed treatment, such as Epi-Pen®, if available

** Start CPR if necessary

** Call 911 (even if Epi-Pen® is used)