

Understanding allergies and anaphylaxis

Knowing about allergies enables you to recognise the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.

Definitions

Allergens – allergic triggers, which include airborne allergens (such as dust and pollen), food allergens, insect venom, medication, and rubber products

Allergy – occurs when the immune system reacts to an **allergen** in the environment. A reaction often occurs within minutes or up to a few hours after contact. It can range from mild, to severe, to life-threatening.

Anaphylaxis – the most severe form of allergic reaction, often affecting several parts of the body, including the respiratory system and/or the cardiovascular system. It can be caused by exposure to allergens such as food, insects, latex, or medication. Anaphylaxis is potentially life-threatening.

Anaphylaxis is always a medical emergency. An ambulance must be called and the child must see a doctor, even when an EpiPen has been used.



Source:
Ministry of Education

[View full image \(1.4 MB\)](#)

Allergens

Common causes of allergic reactions in New Zealand:

- **Airborne triggers** – dust mites, pollen, mould spores, allergens from cats and other furry or hairy animals, such as dogs, horses, rabbits, and guinea pigs
- **Food allergens** – any type of food can trigger an allergic reaction. The most common food allergens are milk (dairy), eggs, peanuts, tree-nuts, seeds such as sesame seeds, soy, wheat, shellfish, and fish.
- **Insect venom** – bee and wasp stings
- **Other triggers** – medications, latex in rubber products.

Source: [Allergy New Zealand](#)

Food allergy and food intolerance

A **food allergy** is an abnormal immune system response to the introduction of a food, an ordinarily harmless substance, into the body. In some people a food allergy is life threatening.

A **food intolerance** does not involve the immune system. It does not cause severe allergic reactions (known as anaphylaxis). Reactions can be immediate or delayed for up to 20 hours after a food is eaten. These reactions are not the same as allergies, but may include:

- rashes and swelling of the skin
 - asthma and a stuffy or runny nose
 - irritable bowel symptoms, such as colic, bloating, and diarrhoea
 - migraines, headaches, lethargy, and irritability.
-

This information was downloaded/printed from the Ministry of Education's website "Inclusive Education". Except where otherwise noted it is Crown Copyright 2018.

Information on the Inclusive Education website is regularly updated so we recommend you check the website version of this information to ensure it remains current.
