



Risk Management Considerations for Anaphylaxis and Sabrina's Law

In May 2005, the Ontario government passed into law Bill 3: An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Pupils. This Act affects all publicly funded schools in Ontario. It is named "Sabrina's Law" in honour of Sabrina Shannon. Sabrina died after eating French-fries in her high school's cafeteria. She was assured that the fries had been made in vegetable oil, not peanut oil, which she was severely allergic to. Despite the young girl's precautions, she suffered an anaphylactic reaction that put her into a coma before anyone could administer her an Epi-pen. It was later found that her lunch had been cross contaminated by tongs used to lift her fries.

The law became effective January 1, 2006. This law requires that every school board establish and maintain an anaphylaxis policy. It also requires that principals develop individual plans for pupils at risk of anaphylaxis.

Schools, as well as parks and recreation programs, need to have a risk management plan in place to reduce the risk of deadly anaphylactic reactions. Anaphylaxis can appear suddenly and violently. It can be developed by anyone, not just those with a known allergy. Staff need to help keep people safe by preventing and dealing with an allergic reaction. Working as a team, parents and staff can help manage anaphylaxis.

Assess Your Program

- Do you have appropriate policies and procedures in place for dealing with anaphylaxis?
- Do you have a training program for your employees on how to deal with anaphylactic shock?
- Is there a documentation system for all participants' allergies and reactions?
- Are there Epi-pen guidelines in place?

Before the Program Begins

- Ensure that registration forms include information on whether a child has allergies and what the nature of those allergies are.
- Highlight information on children that use an Epi-pen. Consider using "allergy alert forms" that include information and a picture of the child.
- Advise children and parents of the importance of bringing their Epi-pen to the program.
- Advise that if the Epi-pen is forgotten, efforts will be made to contact the family to have them either bring the Epi-pen or pick up the child.
- Advise parents that normally one pen is required per child, but more may be necessary if an activity is more than 10 minutes from a medical facility.
- Train all staff on anaphylaxis and how to use an Epi-pen. Consider bringing in a qualified instructor.
- Familiarize staff on the health concerns of each child.

During the Program

- The Epi-pen should be kept with the child at all times.
- If the child is swimming, the staff should know the location of the pen.
- During such activities, keep the Epi-pens in a safe place, like a waterproof box.
- Ensure that the Epi-pen is not losing effectiveness due to exposure to extreme hot or cold temperatures.
- Choose activities that do not involve items children are allergic too. (i.e.. doing a craft with nuts).
- If children are taken on a field trip or outing, ensure that information on children who require Epi-pens are with staff and ensure that the child has their Epi-pen with them.
- Inform parents in advance of any activities involving food such as a cook out or bake sale. Ensure that all allergenic foods are kept in a separate area and that food, drinks, straws or utensils are not shared or mixed between containers.

Continuing Education

- Send reminders to parents requesting that allergenic foods not be sent in lunches.
- Consider removing nut items from vending machines on the premises.

Dealing with Anaphylaxis

Know what symptoms to watch for. They can include:

- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Wheezing and drooling.
- Trouble swallowing or feeling of the throat closing.
- Coughing and hoarseness.
- Extreme weakness or dizziness.
- Pale, cold, clammy skin.
- Change in colour.
- Fainting or loss of consciousness.

When confronted with anaphylactic shock, follow these steps:

- Implement your emergency action plan using protocols supplied by the parent/doctor.
- Administer the Epi-pen. Do not use another child's Epi-pen.
- Call 911 and advise that a child is having an anaphylactic reaction with breathing difficulties.

After the reaction, follow these steps:

- Dispose of the Epi-pen in a biohazard container, if one is on-site.
- If a biohazard container isn't easily accessible, use a heavy glass container for short term storage.
- Never re-cap the pen in the original container as staff could easily prick themselves.

With the increased incidence of anaphylaxis and the complexity of strategies to deal with it, it is essential that programs have a plan in place for dealing with allergic reactions. Being prepared could save a life.