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## Allergic reactions emergency first aid

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### Summary

- If you have a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) or an asthma attack and breathing is difficult, call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance.
  - Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) and asthma attacks need emergency first aid.
  - If your doctor says you are at risk of a severe allergic reaction, be sure to carry a device to inject adrenaline (such as an EpiPen®) and a mobile phone to call for help.
  - In an emergency, always call triple zero (000).
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Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) and asthma attacks related to allergies need emergency first aid.

If you (or a family member) have previously had asthma or a severe allergic reaction, prepare an action plan with the help of your doctor. Follow the plan if the symptoms of an allergic reaction appear.

### Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)

Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction include:

- difficult or noisy breathing
- swelling of the tongue
- swelling or tightness of the throat
- difficulty talking or a hoarse voice
- wheeze or persistent cough
- persistent dizziness or collapse
- paleness and floppiness in young children
- abdominal pain and vomiting.

Milder allergic symptoms that can appear before a severe allergic reaction include:

- swelling of your lips, face and eyes
- hives or welts
- tingling mouth
- abdominal pain and vomiting.

If you have experienced any of these symptoms, you are at greater risk of having another severe reaction. Ask your doctor to refer you to a medical specialist (allergist or clinical immunologist).

### Emergency first aid for severe allergic reactions

A severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) is life threatening and requires urgent action.

Emergency responses for severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) are:

- lay the person flat – do not allow them to stand or walk
- administer adrenaline with an autoinjector (such as an EpiPen®)
- always dial triple zero (000) to call an ambulance in a medical emergency.

If you are at risk of a severe allergic reaction, make sure you:

- have a severe allergic reaction action plan
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- carry a mobile phone to call for help when needed.
- carry an adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen®) to treat a severe allergic reaction
- wear medical identification jewellery – this increases the likelihood that adrenaline will be administered in an emergency
- avoid medication (where possible) that may increase the severity of an allergic reaction or complicate its treatment – such as beta blockers
- avoid the known allergen where possible.

### Adrenaline autoinjectors

Adrenaline works fast to reverse a severe allergic reaction and adrenaline autoinjectors (EpiPens®) are designed for use by people who are not medically trained. If you are at risk, your doctor will have prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector.

### Emergency first aid for asthma attacks

If you have asthma, your doctor will prescribe the correct medication and help you to develop a plan to manage your asthma and an action plan for asthma attacks.

Asthma can be well controlled with medication in most people. The main types of medication are:

- relievers that act quickly to relax the muscles around the airways – this is the medication used during an asthma attack
- preventers that slowly make the airways less sensitive to triggers and reduce inflammation inside the airways – they are taken daily to help keep you well
- combination therapies that are preventers containing two different medications.

If you, or someone you know, are having an asthma attack, follow the asthma action plan. In case of emergency, call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance. Tell the operator that someone is having an asthma attack.

The signs of an emergency include when the person:

- finds it very difficult to breathe
- is unable to speak comfortably or if their lips are turning blue
- has symptoms that get worse very quickly
- is getting little or no relief from their reliever inhaler.

While waiting for the ambulance, give four puffs of reliever medication every four minutes.

If the person having the asthma attack (or sudden breathing difficulty) is known to have an allergy to food, insects or medication, always give the adrenaline autoinjector first, and then the asthma relief medication – even if there are no skin symptoms.

### Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Your doctor
- **NURSE-ON-CALL**. Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **St John Ambulance Australia**. (Victoria) Tel. 1300 360 455
- **Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia**. Tel. 1300 728 000
- **Asthma Australia**. Tel. 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462)

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