

Anaphylaxis: assessment and referral after emergency treatment

Information for the public

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Anaphylaxis: the care you should expect

Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that happens quickly and can lead to potentially life-threatening problems with breathing or blood circulation. Most people also have a rash (redness of the skin or hives or both) or swelling.

Well-known causes of anaphylaxis include food (for example, nuts) and insect venom. Allergic reactions to drugs or, less commonly, latex may also result in anaphylaxis. In a large number of cases, especially in adults, there is no identifiable cause and this is known as idiopathic anaphylaxis.

If you go to hospital with suspected anaphylaxis, you will be given emergency treatment with adrenaline.

Taking blood samples in hospital at the time of suspected anaphylaxis can help to confirm whether you had an episode of anaphylaxis. A further blood sample may be needed to provide a baseline measure. This will be taken at a specialist allergy service after you have been discharged from hospital. The allergy service will also try to identify the trigger for the anaphylaxis.

If there is a risk that you may have another episode of anaphylaxis in the future, you will be given a special device for injecting adrenaline called an adrenaline auto injector. You should have 2 of these devices at all times.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people who have visited hospital with suspected anaphylaxis by making sure:

- the signs and symptoms of your suspected anaphylaxis is documented correctly
- blood samples are taken at the appropriate times
- you are observed for an appropriate time after being treated with adrenaline
- you are referred to a specialist allergy service, if appropriate, before being discharged
- you are given information about anaphylaxis, including your triggers if known
- you know how and when to use your adrenaline auto injector.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professional should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

You and your healthcare professional should talk about:

- what anaphylaxis is and how to recognise it
- what might trigger your anaphylaxis
- any changes you can make to help avoid anaphylaxis in the future such as avoiding certain foods or medicines
- what to do if you suspect you or your child is having an episode of anaphylaxis.

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Anaphylaxis UK](#), 01252 542029
- [Allergy UK](#), 01322 619898

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by anaphylaxis and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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