What are Allergies?

What is an allergy?
• The immune system’s job is to keep a person healthy by fighting infections and other dangers to the body

• An allergic reaction happens when the body’s immune system thinks that a particular substance (such as a food, bee sting, or medicine) is a danger. The immune system overreacts and sets off a protective response.

• Some children have mild allergies, and others have severe allergies.

What are the symptoms of an allergy?
• An allergy can cause a mild or severe reaction. Even if the first allergic reaction to a substance is mild, the next reaction might be more severe.

• The most severe type of allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. This type of allergic reaction affects the whole body and is life-threatening.

• Symptoms of anaphylaxis are severe breathing problems, low blood pressure, and changes in heart rate. These symptoms usually start within minutes of exposure to the substance.
What are the symptoms of an allergy? (continued)

- Other symptoms of a severe allergic reaction:
  - Skin:
    - Hives
  - Breathing:
    - Shortness of breath
    - Wheezing
    - Cough
    - Tight throat, difficulty swallowing or breathing
    - Swollen tongue, difficulty talking or breathing
  - Bowel (Gastrointestinal) system:
    - Vomiting
    - Stomach cramps
  - Circulatory system:
    - Weak pulse
    - Low blood pressure
    - Dizziness, feeling faint
    - Blue or pale skin

What should a caretaker know about allergies?

- If a person is having anaphylaxis, he or she needs an injection of epinephrine (usually in the form of an EpiPen)

- If a child has an allergic reaction bad enough to need the EpiPen, the child MUST be taken to the hospital

- If a child needs an EpiPen, it is important to make sure that there is an EpiPen for school and for every caretaker’s home, because a child could have an allergic reaction anywhere. A child’s allergist or pediatrician can prescribe extra doses.

- All caretakers (including the child’s daycare and school) should have a plan for how to react to an allergic reaction

- Caretakers should be taught how and when to use the EpiPen.

- It is important to make sure that the EpiPen is not expired.

- It is VERY important to know a child’s allergies: this includes allergies to food, medicines, and/or bee stings.
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Content Sources:

American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. “Types of Allergies: Food Allergy.”
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