Severe Allergic Reactions in Infants and Toddlers: An Educational Guide

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What is an allergic reaction?

Severe allergic reaction = Anaphylaxis

- An allergic reaction happens when the body thinks something that is usually harmless is dangerous and attacks it
- Common allergens include certain foods, medication and insect stings
- Most allergic reactions happen within minutes to hours after contact with an allergen[1,2]

What are the symptoms of anaphylaxis in infants and toddlers?

Most common symptoms seen in infants and toddlers[1,3]

Swelling of face, lips, hands, or feet
Scratching or pulling at tongue, ears, or eyes

Hives or Rash
Splotchy skin
Color change
Redness or flushing

Vomiting
Diarrhea
Repeated gagging

Wheezing (may be high pitched)
Fast or hard breathing
Hoarse voice
Cough
Hiccups

Fussiness or crying that won't stop
Less active than normal

Recognizing the symptoms of anaphylaxis is the first step to protect your child.

When should epinephrine be used for an allergic reaction?

Anaphylaxis is **RARE but SERIOUS**
and can be life-threatening

GIVE EPINEPHRINE if:

- Symptoms are severe
- **Or**
- More than one symptom appears
- **Or**
- You are worried it's anaphylaxis

If in doubt, don't wait it out – **GIVE EPINEPHRINE**

How should epinephrine be given?

When giving epinephrine, be sure to follow the instructions from your child's doctor and the directions that come with the epinephrine device[1]

Be prepared

Always carry **2**
UNEXPIRED DEVICES

Treat quickly

If your child has symptoms of anaphylaxis, don't be afraid to
USE EPINEPHRINE

If symptoms continue

Give a
SECOND DOSE
starting 5 minutes after the first dose

Get help if needed

SEEK EMERGENCY HELP
if advised to do so in the action plan given by your doctor or if your child is not getting better

What should I know about epinephrine?

Epinephrine = Adrenaline

- Epinephrine is a natural hormone produced by the body
- It helps improve breathing and raises blood pressure to treat the allergic reaction[4]

Epinephrine is considered safe[4,5]

- Common side effects noticeable in infants & toddlers[5]:
  - Restlessness
  - Shakiness
  - Breathing problems
  - Sweating
  - Vomiting
  - Paled skin
- Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own[5]

Seek medical care if side effects persist or are concerning

References

1. Golden DBK, et al. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol*. 2024;132(2):124-176.
2. Dribin TE, et al. *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. 2025:S0091-6749(25)00072-7.
3. Handorf A, et al. *J Allergy Clin Immunol Pract*. 2024;12(8):2026-2034
4. Sicherer SH, et al. *Pediatrics*. 2017;140(2):e20170194.
5. Cardona V, et al. *Int Arch Allergy Immunol*. 2017;173(3):171-177.

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