



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Secretariat

April 2009

Committee of Management of the University Health Services

Guidelines on the management of individuals at risk of Anaphylaxis

Introduction

An increasing number of people are vulnerable to severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) which can affect the entire body within a few minutes of exposure to the allergen and lead to death if not treated promptly. There are several causes of anaphylaxis of which food is the most common (others include bee and wasp stings, drugs and latex). Nuts and nut products are the commonest food cause of an anaphylactic reaction. Other trigger foods include dairy products, eggs, shellfish, fish, soya, pulses and sesame seeds. The general principles in this document apply to all cases of anaphylaxis.

The symptoms can vary in severity and may include some of the following: itchy skin, swelling of lips, tongue and face, difficulty in breathing, stomach ache, vomiting, runny nose, swelling of the throat resulting in difficulty in swallowing, dizziness and/or loss of consciousness.

There is no vaccine against food-induced allergic reactions; the only preventative measure is avoidance. The most effective treatment is adrenaline (epinephrine) which needs to be given as an injection. Most deaths occur because adrenaline is not administered or is administered too late.

Catering in University Departments, Faculties and Institutions is provided by a number of different public and private sector caterers and in some cases is open to the general public. As Departments, Faculties and Institutions do not have access to student medical records and are not normally able to exercise the same level of control over caterers as Colleges, it is important that they avoid providing advice that may prove misleading or that can not be substantiated. They are advised that a suitable disclaimer (e.g. "We cannot guarantee that our products are free from nut traces") is appropriate, and reminded that catering and other staff should be briefed on what action to take if an incident occurs.

Action

The majority of students who are likely to suffer an anaphylactic reaction will know that they are at risk and will be able to take responsibility for their own safety. Institutions and Colleges will need to decide what action it would be appropriate for them to take. Colleges that require students to eat in Hall may wish to draw up a formal action plan. The following steps may be helpful in this.

Step One – Identification of students at risk

- College Admissions Tutors should ensure that there is a specific section on food or other allergies in the health questionnaire sent to new students before their arrival. A recommended list of questions is included in **Appendix I**.
- Those responsible for College open days or admissions (e.g. Admissions Tutors) or for University open days and similar events (e.g. Departmental, Faculty, Cambridge Admissions Office officers) should ensure that all prospective students attending open days or interviews are advised, before their arrival, to take all necessary precautions for their safety whilst eating in and around the Colleges and the University if they have a serious allergy.

- All completed health questionnaires should be reviewed by the College Nurse or (where there is none) the Senior Tutor or Admissions Tutor. Anyone with a history of allergic reactions should be invited to see the College Nurse within 48 hours of arrival in College.
- At that interview it should be established whether the student has been advised appropriately about the management of allergy and anaphylaxis.
- If there is any doubt about this, arrangements should be made for the student to be seen by a local GP.

Step Two – Record-keeping

- College Nurses should keep a record of each affected individual's allergy and any associated dietary requirements. This should be reviewed with the student on a regular basis.
- Key personnel should be informed of each student at risk. These could include Senior Tutor, Head Porter, Catering Manager, Departmental Administrator and University First-aiders.
- Consideration should be given to providing photographs of affected students for the Head Porter and Catering Manager, with the student's permission.

Step Three – The Student's Responsibility

- Students should be encouraged to take responsibility for managing their allergy. They should know what to avoid and what constitutes a reasonable level of risk when choosing food to eat.
- Students should be encouraged to meet with appropriate personnel within the relevant Catering Department(s). In discussion with the Head Chef and others, the student's requirements and dining patterns may be established so that a plan may be put in place to enable safe catering to be provided.
- Students should be encouraged carry their EpiPen (if prescribed) and any other appropriate medication at all times, and to carry a "medical alert" or "SOS" talisman containing medical information. They may wish to show friends or room-mates how to use the EpiPen.
- If adrenaline has been given, the individual should go to hospital for observation.

Step Four – Staff Communication and Training

- Staff should be briefed to help create an understanding of food allergies and their potentially fatal consequences. It may be useful to identify key personnel who would be able to answer subsequent queries from staff or students.
- Key catering and other staff should be given awareness training in the emergency procedures detailed in **Appendix II**. The University's Occupational Health Service is able to provide help with training sessions for those Colleges without anyone to provide this. Training should be recorded in personnel files.

- Casual waiting and serving staff should be briefed about the menu content of each meal, and should be given a contact person who could deal with queries about specific dishes.
- Other University and College staff who may offer students food and drink on an irregular, casual basis – this may range, for instance, from open days or similar events to informal, social contexts such as post-lecture receptions, or parties for supervision pupils or Tutees, etc. – should be informed about the awareness training in the emergency procedures detailed in **Appendix II**.
- If it is felt desirable for Porters and/or other College Staff to assist in the administration of an EpiPen in an emergency, then consideration must be given to training and insurance. The Anaphylaxis Campaign's leaflet "*Anaphylaxis and Schools*" contains useful information in this regard.

Step Five – Guidance to Catering Staff

- Catering establishments, including College Halls, should identify items containing nuts or other allergenic foods and introduce nut-free meals or dishes. It should be noted, however, that traces of nuts on cooking implements, work surfaces etc can contaminate 'nut-free' dishes, and also that nuts form a hidden ingredient in a wide range of foods.
- It is recommended that the following actions be considered:
 - Ensure that any item containing nuts or other allergenic foods is clearly indicated on the menu.
 - Rename recipes to highlight hidden ingredients, for example: apple and sultana nut crumble, carrot and peanut salad.
 - Avoid the indiscriminate use of nuts as a garnish etc.
 - Ask suppliers to provide accurate written details of all ingredients. Ensure that all staff (including temporary staff) have access to this information.
 - Invite anyone suffering from a food allergy to make themselves known to the Catering Manager to discuss their dietary requirements.
 - Provide nut-free meals during Freshers' Week or throughout the year – but noting the caveat about contamination above.
 - Adopt catering practices to minimise the risk of cross-contamination. The following are common hazards: - oil used to fry peanut burgers then used for other products; cake tongs used to handle products with and without nuts; knives used to spread butter or dairy margarine then used for "milk-free sandwiches".
- Further information for caterers can be found in the Food Standards Agency's leaflet *Be Allergy Aware* (<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/allergyleaflet.pdf>).

Step Six – Monitoring and Evaluation

- Any action plan should be evaluated on a regular basis as part of the Health and Safety Audit of the College or institution.

APPENDIX I Questions to be used in the health questionnaire

- Have you ever had a serious allergic reaction?
- If so, do you know what triggered it?
- Do you have any food allergies?
- If so, to which foods are you allergic?
- Do you carry any medication for allergies?
- Have you been seen by a specialist (Allergist) and received
 - (i) advice on avoidance,
 - (ii) advice on management of a reaction and
 - (iii) a written emergency treatment plan?

APPENDIX II Emergency procedures

Symptoms of extreme allergic reactions

- Swelling or closing up of the throat
- Difficulty breathing; wheezing
- Generalised rash or hives all over the body
- Swelling of the face or lips
- Floppiness or weakness
- Abdominal cramps and nausea
- Collapse

Note: these symptoms may not all be present

Action

- If available, an EpiPen (an auto-injector) should be used to administer adrenaline immediately by intra-muscular injection into the thigh muscles. This should be done by the student or with the assistance of a trained person and can save life when given promptly.
- An ambulance should be called immediately. The following information should be given:
 - It is an emergency.
 - The patient has collapsed with anaphylactic shock (pronounced "anna-fill-ack-tick").
 - The cause of the allergy (if known).
 - The address, postcode, floor and room number (if appropriate).

Someone should be sent to wait at the entrance to the site or building to direct the ambulance crew to the patient. Speed of treatment is essential and can be a matter of life or death.

- If the patient is conscious, a sitting position may help to relieve any breathing difficulties. If they have collapsed, they should be laid flat with their feet raised. If they are unconscious or become unconscious they should be put into the recovery position.
- The College Nurse or a trained First Aider should be called and the student's tutor should be informed.

APPENDIX III Useful organisations

The Anaphylaxis Campaign
PO Box 275
Farnborough
Hants GU14 6SX
Helpline: 01252 542029
Website: www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

Allergy Clinic (Clinic 2a)
Box 40
Addenbrooke's Hospital
Hills Road
Cambridge CB2 2QQ
Tel: 01223 217777 or 586977
Website:
http://www.cuh.org.uk/addenbrookes/patients/outpatients/clinics/clinic_2a.html

NHS Direct
Tel: 0845 4647
Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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