

safety Toolbox Talks for matters

From your safety partners at PL&B Insurance

Dealing with Severe Allergic Reactions

When a patron or co-worker has a severe allergic reaction, it happens quickly and can be life-threatening. Since it is estimated that two out of every 100 people are at risk for a severe allergic reaction to food or other substances, it is crucial that employees take steps to avoid these dangerous reactions, and that they know how to recognize them and what to do to if they are on the scene when a person has a reaction.

What Triggers Allergic Reactions?

Food is one of the most common causes of severe allergic reactions, called anaphylaxis. Nearly any food can trigger an allergic reaction. However, many times no specific cause can be found. A reaction may occur moments after the person has consumed the food or hours later.

Severe reactions can occur in anyone - even adults with no history of allergic reaction. However, those people with a history of previous severe reactions and those with asthma are most at risk for life-threatening anaphylaxis.

Foods that are often identified as allergens include nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, soy, fish and shellfish. These ingredients, or anything that comes into contact with them, can cause severe allergic reactions. Talk to employees to help them identify items on the menu that include these ingredients or that may be contaminated with these items even if they are not listed as ingredients.

Catering to Allergy-Prone Patrons

If a patron informs an employee of a food allergy, they should always assume it is a life-or-death matter – it could be. Upon request, employees should be ready to provide a complete list of ingredients for anything we serve. It is our legal responsibility to give accurate information

about possible food allergens. When in doubt about a dish, do not serve it!

In food preparation, employees need to exercise extreme caution when working with these potentially allergenic substances. They should never reuse a utensil, dish or cutting board that has touched any of these common allergens, for example.

Recognizing a Severe Reaction

A severe allergic reaction is characterized by any or all of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath or tightness of chest
- Difficulty breathing
- Sneezing, wheezing or coughing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Swelling of eyes, lips, face, tongue, throat or elsewhere
- Low blood pressure, dizziness, fainting
- Rapid or weak pulse
- Blueness around lips, inside lips, eyelids
- Sweating and anxiety
- Itching, raised red rash
- Skin flushing or extreme pallor
- Hoarseness
- Involuntary bowel or bladder action
- Nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea
- Burning sensation, especially face or chest
- Loss of consciousness

Having just one of these symptoms does not necessarily mean a person is having an allergic reaction, but it is a good indication.

Treating a Reaction

Allergic reactions must be treated with epinephrine, also known as adrenaline. The most important aspect of treatment is to respond quickly. Employees should be

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prepared to administer it immediately at all times. Remind employees of the location of the epinephrine, and make sure they periodically check the supply.

If employees suspect a patron or co-worker is experiencing an allergic reaction, they should prepare the epinephrine, even if they are unsure. It is safer to give the person the epinephrine than to delay treatment. After administering epinephrine, employees need to call 911 immediately and arrange for follow-up care.