Anaphylaxis and Allergy in the Emergency Department

Up to 30% of people are affected by some kind of allergy. Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death. Anaphylaxis symptoms can range from mild to severe and typically involve at least 2 body systems (e.g., respiratory, cardiovascular). This information is intended to build awareness and support policy development around anaphylaxis and severe allergy.

Each year, 1% of all emergency department (ED) visits are for an allergic reaction (including anaphylaxis). 8% of these visits are for anaphylaxis specifically.

Emergency treatment

Canadian allergists’ recommendations include the following if you suspect an anaphylactic reaction:
• Give epinephrine auto-injector.
• Call 9-1-1.
• Go to the nearest hospital.

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Contact us

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References

2. Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. Anaphylaxis in Schools and Other Settings. 2014.

In Ontario and Alberta alone, there were more than 85,400 ED visits for an allergic reaction (including anaphylaxis) in 2013–2014.

Extrapolating to all of Canada means there would have been more than 171,000 visits to the ED for allergy that year.
• Children younger than 18 made up 1 in 3 patients coming to the ED for allergic reactions, compared with 1 in 5 for all other reasons.

• Most allergic reactions were classified as “Unspecified” (69%). Insect/snake bites accounted for 15% of visits; 11% of visits were food related and 5% were drug related.

**People more often go to the ED for allergic reactions in the summer; visits for food-related reactions are also common in December.**

| Table 1: Percentage of visits to the ED for allergic reaction (including anaphylaxis), by category and month, 2013–2014 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Unspecified* | 6.9 | 6.3 | 7.3 | 8.0 | 9.6 | 9.7 | 10.3 | 10.2 | 9.3 | 8.3 | 7.2 | 7.1 |
| Insect/snake bite | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 2.9 | 5.1 | 23.7 | 29.9 | 29.5 | 7.4 | 0.4 | 0.2 |
| Food | 7.7 | 7.2 | 8.2 | 7.3 | 8.7 | 8.5 | 8.8 | 9.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.1 | 9.2 |
| Drug | 8.2 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.3 | 7.9 | 8.7 | 7.6 | 7.8 | 8.6 | 8.5 | 8.4 |
| All other ED visits | 8.3 | 7.6 | 8.5 | 8.1 | 8.7 | 8.4 | 8.8 | 8.6 | 8.3 | 8.4 | 7.9 | 8.4 |

* Includes hives, edema and other unspecified reactions.

Orange boxes indicate a greater percentage of visits.

Includes Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Yukon.

**Source**

National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, 2014, Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The rate of visits specifically for anaphylaxis represents a small but growing portion, increasing by 95% per 100,000 population between 2006–2007 and 2013–2014.

Since 2006–2007, there has been a 64% increase in the rate of individuals dispensed an epinephrine auto-injector. Total spending on epinephrine auto-injectors is also rising, increasing 28% in the last 3 years. In comparison, spending for all other drugs rose only 10%, according to data from IMS Brogan.