

Information about Allergies



Definitions:

Allergy – A true immune system response. Antibodies are created in response to a medicine, blood product, latex, food protein, or insect sting. Symptoms can be severe and life-threatening.

Intolerance – No immune system response. Symptoms are normally not life-threatening. Lactose intolerance is an example of a food intolerance.

Anaphylaxis – **This is an allergic emergency!** It is a sudden, severe allergic reaction. It can cause dangerous symptoms including difficulty breathing, tongue and throat swelling, low blood pressure, shock and even death.

What are some signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction ?

- Hives
- Puffy face, lips, or tongue
- Itchy red skin
- Hard to breathe
- Tight throat
- Vomiting, cramps, and/or diarrhea
- Weakness (drop in blood pressure)

Talk with your child's medical provider about any past reactions. Try to include the following information:

- **Type.** Name of the medicine, blood product, or food.
- **What.** How did your child react? Be as detailed as possible.
- **When.** Did the reaction happen within a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or weeks later?
- **Treatment.** Did your child need any treatment for the reaction?
- **Avoid.** Have you been told to avoid a medicine, blood product, or food?
- **Allergy Specialist.** Does your child see a specialist for any allergies?

What does parent preference mean?

Parent preference is when you, as the parent or caregiver, request that a certain medicine not be given. The reason could be because of your child's reaction to a certain medicine in the past.

Talk with your child's medical provider. Ask, "Are there reasons my child has to get this medicine? If so, who is the contact person that will talk to me about this?"

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Frequently asked questions:

1. My child has a food allergy. Where can I get more information?

- **FAME** (Food Allergy Management and Education) manual and tool-kit on the St. Louis Children's Hospital website. Go to stlouischildrens.org and search "FAME".
- Call **FAME** at 314-286-0947 or email FAME@bjc.org
- Contact the St. Louis Children's Hospital Family Resource Center, a health information library on the 3rd floor. Call 314-454-2350 or email frc@bjc.org

2. I thought my child had an allergy but his medical provider said it is actually an intolerance. What does this mean?

- With an allergy, the immune system responds to a substance and can cause symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- With an intolerance, there is no immune system response. Symptoms are normally not life-threatening. Potential symptoms include gastrointestinal symptoms like gas, bloating, abdominal pain, and/or headaches.

3. My child had an allergic reaction to a specific medicine or blood product, but her medical provider said my child may still need to get this substance. What does this mean?

- There may be a time where an allergy is determined by the medical provider but no other choices are available. At this time, your child's medical provider will talk with you about this decision and the risks/benefits involved.

4. What is "pre-medicine"?

- To prevent an intolerance reaction, your child may need to be "pre-medicated" or given specific medicine before receiving blood products or medicines like Vancomycin.
- Typical pre-medicines are Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and/or Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®).

Information contained in this handout is adapted from FAME. For more information on FAME or managing food allergies, please call 314-286-0947 or email FAME@bjc.org