

## **BACKGROUND: 3 FACTS *you should know about Anaphylaxis***

**1. It is a growing concern for Canadians.** 1.3 million Canadians live with food allergy. Health Canada reports "Food allergies are sensitivities caused by a reaction of the body's immune system to specific proteins in a food. Current estimates are that food allergies affect as many as 6% of young children and 3% to 4% of adults." This means hundreds of thousands of Canadian families cope with food allergies every minute of every day. Without treatment, anaphylaxis, the most severe form of an allergic reaction, can cause death. Recent North American research, reported in *Allergic Living* magazine Spring 2010, shows that peanut allergy grew by 250 per cent over 11 years.

**2. It is a tremendous cost to the country's health system.** Health Canada, as reported in *Maclean's* magazine, (2005) estimates allergic diseases cost the Canadian economy \$15 billion every year, in everything from emergency room visits to prescribed medications. As the number of people affected increases, so do the associated costs, such as emergency room visits and lost time from work.

**3. It is deadly serious.** Anaphylaxis is seldom outgrown – only 20% of the time. Of the 1.56 million Canadians that have experienced anaphylactic reactions, 1.3 million remain deadly allergic to specific foods. For them, it is a life-long, chronic, invisible medical condition. It often co-exists with asthma, resulting in more severe consequences. Anaphylaxis has no cure, and no preventative treatment. Reactions, always accidental and unexpected, are treated after exposure – never before. Antihistamines might mask symptoms; they do not prevent severe reactions. Staying safe requires 100% avoidance of a person's allergen, 100% of the time.

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**Anaphylactic reactions can result in death.** Reactions can be swift or can occur several hours after exposure to an allergy trigger. If not treated immediately, reactions can result in death. This means it is important to be able to recognize the symptoms and to know that all reactions should be treated as a medical emergency. Anaphylactic reactions are systemic. Two or more body systems will react simultaneously (skin, respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, airway obstruction, loss of blood pressure). Life threatening symptoms include a drop in blood pressure (loss of consciousness that can lead to death) and respiratory distress (that can lead to death).

**Why should I care?** Surveys confirm more than fifty percent of Canadians know someone with a food allergy. When you are looking after, feeding or socializing with a person with a food allergy – you want to be informed. You do not want to risk this person's life. Reducing risk prevents medical emergencies. Knowing the signs and symptoms of a reaction, and knowing how to respond, saves lives. Allergy specialists recognize there is much confusion among the general public about the prevalence and impact of asthma and allergies. *AllerGen*, Spring 2010 reports: "This confusion is often heightened by sloppy reporting in the media. A good example is the controversial article *It's Just Nuts*, which appeared in the December 2009 issue of *Chatelaine* magazine. This article contained many inaccuracies. Ultimately it misrepresented the risks and prevalence associated with peanut allergies." Knowledge saves lives.

**For more information, visit [www.nask.ca](http://www.nask.ca) and call:**

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