

Safety Note #137

ALLERGY AWARENESS



Information available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate the immune systems of more than 50 million Americans overreact to substances every year. These types of overreactions are termed allergies and may be caused by foods, plants, animals, manufactured products, or medicines.

Being aware about allergies and allergic reactions is useful knowledge should an allergic reaction occur and a colleague or co-worker requires some form of assistance.

Substances (or allergens) that Cause Allergies

- The eight most common food allergens are milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.
- Typical allergenic plants include ragweeds, pigweeds, and all grasses. Shade trees such as oaks, elms, maples, pecans, mulberries, and cottonwoods can also cause allergies.
- Latex allergies are associated with gloves and other products that use latex rubber.
- Bees, hornets, wasps, yellow jackets, and fire ants can cause insect sting allergies.
- Cat and dog dander are common allergens.

Allergic Reaction Symptoms

- Hives and rashes.
- Tingling in the mouth.
- Wheezing and coughing.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Cramping.
- Vomiting or diarrhea.
- Dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Swelling of the lips, throat, and/or tongue.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Anaphylactic shock or a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction including lowering of blood pressure.

Preventing and Responding to Allergic Reactions

- The preferred method for preventing allergic reactions is to strictly avoid those substances that trigger an allergic response.
- If a person has allergies, they should always pay close attention to potential allergens in their surroundings and to the ingredients in the types of food they may consume.
- People with allergies should wear a Medic Alert identifier, so that in case of an accident, others will know about their allergies and reactions.
- Persons who have severe allergies are encouraged to tell co-workers (and their supervisor) in advance so they can respond appropriately if an allergic reaction occurs.
- If you observe a person having allergic reaction symptoms, promptly seek professional medical assistance.