

October 19, 2010

Alberta unveils online training tool to help allergic students

Spruce Grove... Knowing what to do and how to do it can mean the difference between life and death for a student experiencing a severe allergic reaction.

The Alberta government and Anaphylaxis Canada have joined forces to launch the Canadian Anaphylaxis Readiness Education (C.A.R.E.) web-based training program for schools across the province. Teachers and administrators will now have quick access to important and easy-to-understand tips for keeping allergic students safe.

Anaphylaxis is a severe and potentially life-threatening allergic reaction. Food allergies are the most common cause, but insect stings, medication, latex and exercise (typically after eating a specific food) can also cause a reaction. It is vital that staff in schools are trained to respond appropriately.

“The safety of our schoolchildren is of the utmost importance to everyone involved in the education system,” said Dave Hancock, Alberta’s Minister of Education. “This is an example of government collaborating with stakeholders to provide a comprehensive response to health concerns in the school setting.”

The new interactive training program is designed to prepare educators for an anaphylactic reaction in their school. It incorporates graphics, audio and text and is accessible anytime, anywhere. It is available in English and French at LearnAlberta.ca, a website that provides educators with online learning resources directly tied to topics that Alberta students are learning in their classrooms.

The online program was developed by Leap Learning Technologies Inc., Anaphylaxis Canada and the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology with support from the Government of Alberta and other key stakeholders including McMaster University and AllerGen NCE Inc.

“Our schools play a critical role in keeping allergic children safe,” said Laurie Harada, Executive Director of Anaphylaxis Canada and parent of a teen with food allergies. “This valuable resource will help ensure educators are better prepared to minimize risks in the school environment and respond appropriately to an allergic reaction.”

The new learning resource complements the Allergy and Anaphylaxis Informational Response (AAIR) resource kits introduced in all public, separate, charter, private and francophone schools in Alberta in 2008. The kits contain information about anaphylaxis and asthma, including educational CDs and training devices for the EpiPen® and Twinject® brands of

epinephrine auto-injectors available in Canada.

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Backgrounder: Variety of causes can trigger a life-threatening allergic reaction

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Variety of causes can trigger a life-threatening allergic reaction

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylactic shock is an explosive overreaction of the body's immune system to a triggering agent called an allergen. Symptoms include swelling, difficulty breathing, abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, circulatory collapse, coma - even death. After an initial exposure to an allergen such as bee sting toxin, a person's immune system becomes overly sensitized to that allergen. An allergic reaction occurs if the person comes in contact with the allergen again. Food allergies are the most common cause of anaphylaxis, but insect stings, medication or latex can also cause a reaction.

How can I recognize a reaction?

Specific warning signs as well as the severity and intensity of symptoms can vary from person to person and sometimes from episode to episode in the same person. The quantity of allergen, other health issues such as asthma or the use of certain medication can impact the severity of the reaction.

Signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis can include:

- Tingling, numbness, pain in the lips and tongue
- Itchy eyes, nose, and face
- Flushing of the face and body
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, tongue and throat
- Difficulty swallowing, wheezing, coughing, difficulty talking and breathing
- Hives, abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea
- Weakness and dizziness, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, death.

What is the Canadian Anaphylaxis Readiness Education program and who can access it?

The C.A.R.E. e-module is a web-based training program designed to help teachers, school administrators and other school personnel prevent and manage emergency situations. It can now be accessed by educators at no cost through the learnAlberta.ca portal.

Alberta School Boards Association Anaphylaxis Policy

The goal of the anaphylaxis policy is to create an allergy-safe or allergy-aware environment. Management of students at risk of life-threatening allergies is a shared responsibility among students, parents, the school system and health-care providers. For more information about the policy, visit <http://www.asba.ab.ca/services/policy-ad-anaphyl07.asp>.

Why does the policy refer to allergen-safe or allergen-aware rather than allergen-free?

A school cannot guarantee allergens will never enter a school environment. However, they can implement policies and procedures to ensure the school community knows how to prevent, react to and treat someone suffering an anaphylactic reaction. Creating awareness provides knowledge beneficial to students regardless of the environment or allergen they may encounter.

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