

Allergies

Allergies Safety Talk

Allergies are an issue that many people have to pay attention to every day both on and off the job. There are many sources of allergens that can cause an allergic reaction. Common allergens include pollen, dust mites, food, drugs, latex, animal dander, insect stings, and mold. A few of these allergens may be an issue while on the job. It is important to know what you are allergic to as well as communicating it to others in case of an exposure resulting in an emergency situation. In this safety talk we will discuss two common allergens that could be the source of a severe allergic reaction on the job.

Insect Stings



Insect stings are a common cause of allergic reactions on the job. Most people respond to an insect bite with redness and some minor swelling in the sting area. Some individuals have a much more severe reaction including ones that are life threatening. A life threatening reaction to any allergen, including an insect sting, is called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening whole-body allergic reaction that can impair your breathing, cause a dramatic drop in your blood pressure and affect your heart rate. According to the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology, there are five insects most likely to cause an allergic reaction in the United States. These five insects are yellow jackets, honey bees, paper wasps, hornets, and fire ants.

The best practice when dealing with these insects is to avoid them whenever possible. If working outdoors survey the work area for any possible nests or areas that could produce these insects. Wear clothing that covers the majority of the skin in case of an attack. It is important to have an EPI Pen that is easily accessible on the job if you are at risk for a severe allergic reaction due to insect stings.

Food Allergies

According to the Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America, people visit the emergency room about 200,000 times each year because of food allergies. Also, almost 10,000 people stay overnight in the hospital each year because of food allergies. There can be many different kinds of food that cause an allergic reaction. Some of the most common food allergies are milk, tree nuts, peanuts, soy, shellfish, fish, and eggs.

The best practice to reduce the chance of an allergic reaction due to food is to know what the allergen is and avoid any food it could possibly be in. Some individuals' sensitivity is so extreme that if their food is sharing the same refrigerator space as the source of their allergen that they could experience a reaction. It is important that the people around you at work are aware of any food allergy that causes a severe allergic reaction so they can help prevent cross contamination resulting in an allergic reaction for you. Also make sure you have an EPI pen on hand if you experience severe allergic reactions due to food allergies.

Summary

While many employers will not ask for allergy information due to HIPPA regulations, it is important to communicate any allergens to someone on the job who is in a management position. Proper and immediate treatment is crucial for someone suffering from a severe allergic reaction. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical treatment, including an injection of epinephrine and a trip to a hospital emergency room. If it isn't treated properly, anaphylaxis can be fatal.