Allergies & Epinephrine Auto-Injectors

An allergy is defined as an acquired, abnormal immune response to a substance (or allergen). Allergic reactions can occur at any time when exposed to an allergen. Common allergens are inhalants (dusts, pollens, smoke, perfumes), foods (wheat, eggs, peanuts, milk), and drugs (aspirin, antibiotics). Severe allergic reactions (e.g. anaphylactic reaction) occur when the body’s immune system strongly reacts to a particular allergenic protein or irritant. Food, insect stings, medications or latex may cause these reactions. (Health Canada website)

When a person has food allergies, their immune system mistakenly identifies a food protein as being harmful. Exposure to the “harmful” protein creates antibodies. Subsequent exposures cause more antibodies and chemicals such as histamine to be released. “Histamine is a powerful chemical that can cause a reaction in the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin or cardiovascular system. In the most extreme cases, food allergies can be fatal.” (Health Canada website) Allergic individuals should be aware that any food could cause an immune response, however, only a few foods are responsible for the majority of food allergies. The top 9 food allergens are:

- peanuts,
- eggs,
- milk,
- tree nuts,
- wheat,
- soy,
- sesame seeds,
- seafood (fish, crustaceans, and shellfish),
- and sulphites.

Coming in contact with an allergen causes the symptoms of a reaction to occur. The symptoms may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. A severe reaction to an allergen is called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a severe, potentially life threatening allergic reaction caused by contact with certain foods, medications, insect venom or latex. A person having any of the following symptoms:

- Flushed face
- Hives
- Rash
- Red and itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue
- Trouble breathing, speaking or swallowing
• Anxiety, distress, faintness
• Paleness, weakness
• Cramps
• Diarrhea
• Vomiting
• Drop in blood pressure
• Rapid heart beat
• Loss of consciousness

could be experiencing an allergic reaction.

When faced with a potential anaphylactic reaction, the person should receive an injection of adrenaline immediately. The self-injectable epinephrine shot reverses an allergic reaction, at least temporarily, to provide life-saving time to get further treatment in a medical facility. The person must then be taken to a hospital emergency room for further treatment and observation.

REMEMBER
1. The Safety Person must review the information on the team medical information files and identify the players with allergies.
2. The Safety Person should meet with the player(s) and their parent(s) to discuss the severity of the allergies and the use of an Epinephrine Auto-Injector or other type of medication. The Safety Person should ask the parents whether the player usually administers his or her own Epinephrine Auto-Injector, and should be guided by the usual practice adopted by the family. The Safety Person should not allow the player to administer his or her own Epinephrine Auto-Injector unless the parents agree.
3. The Safety Person should never administer an Epinephrine Auto-Injector for medical use on a player. In short, the Safety Person should never hold the Epinephrine Auto-Injectors on a player’s thigh or glut and activate the auto-injector. The Epinephrine Auto-Injector is a medication and should only be given by the player themselves, if they are trained to do so, or the parent/guardian who knows the player’s condition. A strategy should be worked out by the player, parent and safety person in the advent of an emergency where there is a severe allergic reaction.
4. Activate your EAP when an allergic reaction occurs, as the epinephrine injection is just a temporary relief. Tell the dispatcher that someone is having a life threatening allergic reaction. Ask for an ambulance to be sent immediately.
5. If the player usually administers his or her own medication and the parents agree, the Safety Person may keep the Epinephrine Auto-Injector on the bench or hold it during an activity. The player may ask for the Epinephrine Auto-Injector during a game or practice and administer the medication himself or herself. The Safety Person should have the parents’ written consent before keeping or holding the Epinephrine Auto-Injector for the player. Make sure the Epinephrine Auto-Injector is properly labeled with the player’s name.