

Medical Management of Vaccine Reactions in Adults in a Community Setting

The table below describes steps to take if an adverse reaction occurs after vaccination.

Administering any medicine, including vaccines, can cause an adverse reaction. Always verify container labels to ensure the correct product is being administered. To reduce the risk of an adverse reaction, screen patients for vaccine contraindications and precautions before vaccination (see “Screening Checklist for Contraindications to Vaccines for Adults” at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4065.pdf).

When adverse reactions do occur, they can range from minor (e.g., soreness, itching) to serious (e.g., anaphylaxis). Be prepared.

Vaccinators should know how to recognize allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis. Have a plan and supplies ready to provide appropriate medical care if an event occurs.

REACTION	SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS	MANAGEMENT
Injection site	Soreness, redness, itching, or swelling	Apply a wet cloth to the injection site. Consider giving medication to reduce pain (e.g., Tylenol) or itching (e.g., Benadryl) if needed.
	Slight bleeding	Apply pressure and an adhesive compress over the injection site.
	Continuous bleeding	Place thick layer of gauze pads over site and maintain direct and firm pressure. Raise the bleeding injection site (e.g., arm) above the level of the patient’s heart.
Psychological fright, presyncope, and syncope (fainting)	Anxiety before injection	Have patient sit or lie down for the vaccination.
	Patient feels “faint” (e.g., light-headed, dizzy, weak, nauseated, or has visual disturbance)	Have patient lie flat. Loosen any tight clothing and maintain open airway. Apply cool, damp cloth to patient’s face and neck. Keep patient under close observation until full recovery.
	Fall, without loss of consciousness	Check the patient for injury before trying to move the patient. Place patient flat on back with feet elevated.
	Loss of consciousness	Check the patient for injury before trying to move the patient. Place patient flat on back with feet elevated. Call 911 if patient does not recover promptly.
Anaphylaxis	Skin and mucosal symptoms such as generalized hives, itching, or flushing; swelling of lips, face, throat, or eyes. Respiratory symptoms such as nasal congestion, change in voice, sensation of throat closing, stridor, shortness of breath, wheeze, or cough. Gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping abdominal pain. Cardiovascular symptoms such as collapse, dizziness, tachycardia, hypotension.	See next page for details on treating anaphylaxis.

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Supply List for Managing Anaphylaxis

FIRST-LINE medication

- Epinephrine** 1 mg/mL aqueous solution (1:1000 concentration) in prefilled autoinjector or various vials or ampules. At least three epinephrine doses should be available onsite.

OPTIONAL medications: H₁ antihistamines

- Diphenhydramine** (e.g., Benadryl) oral, 25 mg/5 mL liquid, 25 or 50 mg capsules or tablets

Additional emergency supplies

- Syringes (1 and 3 mL) and needles (22 and 25 g, 1", 1½", and 2") if needed for epinephrine
- Alcohol wipes
- Stethoscope
- Blood pressure measuring device (with a variety of cuff sizes as needed)
- Light with extra batteries (for examination of the mouth and throat)
- A timing device, such as wristwatch, for measuring pulse
- Cell phone or access to onsite phone
- CPR rescue mask with one-way valve
- Oxygen (if available)

See also "Supplies You May Need at an Immunization Clinic" at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3046.pdf.

REFERENCES

Campbell RL, Kelso JM, Anaphylaxis: Emergency treatment, updated August 4, 2022 in UpToDate, www.uptodate.com/contents/anaphylaxis-emergency-treatment

Kroger A, Bahta L, Long S, Sanchez P. General Best Practice Guidelines for Immunization. Best Practices Guidance of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/general-recs/index.html.

Emergency medical protocol for managing anaphylaxis in adults

- 1** If itching and swelling are limited to the injection site, observe patient closely for the development of generalized symptoms.
- 2** If symptoms are generalized, alert the lead clinical healthcare professional on-site and call 911. A healthcare professional should assess the airway, breathing, circulation, and level of consciousness of the patient. Monitor vital signs at 5-minute intervals.
- 3 DOSING INFORMATION: The most important therapy in anaphylaxis is epinephrine. There are NO absolute contraindications to epinephrine in the setting of anaphylaxis.**

a First-line treatment: EPINEPHRINE is the first-line treatment for anaphylaxis. Use **epinephrine** in a 1 mg/mL aqueous solution (1:1000 concentration). Administer a 0.3 mg dose IM using an autoinjector in the mid-outer thigh. If using another epinephrine formulation, the recommended dose is 0.01 mg/kg, ranging for adults from 0.3 mg to maximum dose of 0.5 mg. Administer IM, preferably in the mid-outer thigh.

Epinephrine doses may be repeated 2 additional times at 5–15 minute intervals while waiting for EMS to arrive.

b Optional treatment: H₁ ANTIHISTAMINES relieve itching and urticaria (hives). These medications DO NOT relieve upper or lower airway obstruction, hypotension, or shock. Consider giving diphenhydramine (e.g., Benadryl) for relief of itching and hives. Administer orally 1–2 mg/kg every 4–6 hours, up to a maximum single dose of 100 mg.

- 4** Monitor blood pressure and pulse every 5 minutes. Perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), if necessary, and maintain airway. Keep patient in recumbent position (flat on back) unless he or she is having breathing difficulty. If breathing is difficult, patient's head may be elevated, provided blood pressure is adequate to prevent loss of consciousness. If blood pressure is low, elevate legs.
- 5** Record the patient's reaction (e.g., hives, anaphylaxis) to the vaccine, all vital signs, medications administered to the patient, including the time, dosage, response, and the name of the medical personnel who administered the medication, and other relevant clinical information.
- 6** Notify the patient's primary care physician.
- 7** Report the incident to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) at www.vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html.

This policy and procedure shall remain in effect for all patients of the _____
NAME OF PRACTICE OR CLINIC

effective _____ until rescinded or until _____ .
DATE DATE

Medical Director _____ / _____
PRINT NAME SIGNATURE DATE