

Children's Health

How Smart Parents Handle Medical Emergencies

(NAPSA)—In a medical emergency, every second counts—and this is especially true for children who live with food allergies.

According to AllergicChild.com, food allergies affect 6 to 7 million Americans. Eight foods in particular account for 90 percent of all allergic reactions: peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, soy and wheat.

Food allergies are the leading cause of anaphylaxis, the immediate and severe reaction to certain foods that accounts for approximately 30,000 emergency room visits annually. An allergic reaction from food proves fatal for 100 to 200 people each year.

Most school-age children eat two meals a day unsupervised by their parents. Without knowing it, children may consume ingredients that cause allergic reactions, and in some cases it only takes a tiny amount for a person to have a severe reaction.

Without proper supervision, children can experience symptoms ranging from hives, swelling, nausea and loss of consciousness to even death.

In case of just such an emergency, the child's personal health information should be available to his or her caretaker and emergency personnel.

One simple solution is the MedicAlert's Kid Smart® program. MedicAlert, known for its personalized lifesaving services since 1956, has improved on a successful child-specific program that safeguards and identifies children during an emergency.

By wearing a personalized MedicAlert bracelet, children are provided with 24-hour child emer-



The Kid Smart program helps parents by identifying children who have life-threatening allergic reactions and getting the child proper treatment should an emergency occur.

gency ID and family emergency notification services. If a child experiences a life-threatening allergic reaction, it's important to dial 911 and notify them about the situation.

Emergency medical personnel are trained to look for the MedicAlert bracelet, which provides the child's personal identification number, primary medical condition(s) including any allergies, and the 24-hour emergency hotline number. A call to the hotline enables responders to access vital medical information. Through its Family Notification service, MedicAlert will call the parents and tell them what's happened.

David Cope, father of 18-year-old Derek, can attest to the comfort this program provides his family. Derek was diagnosed with being severely allergic to beef and dairy products at age 2.

"If an emergency occurs and we are not there with Derek, the paramedics or emergency staff will know instantly that they need to administer epinephrine, control his breathing and get him to the hospital," said Cope.

He signed his son up for the program after Derek consumed a small amount (0.05mg) of a dairy product found in rice ice cream labeled "dairy free," resulting in an emergency room visit.

The program is just one step in safeguarding children from such medical emergencies before and when they occur. There are other efforts to consider:

- Inform your circle of friends, family, teachers, nurses and other school or day care officials about the seriousness of your child's allergy. Provide pamphlets or discuss the facts of the allergy and how to recognize the symptoms of a reaction.

- Define a clear action plan that can be used during anaphylaxis. This can be a detailed process developed from scratch with your pediatrician or the simple plan outlined by the program.

- Take control of your children's diet and help them take control of their own diet. Try to pack children's lunches every day to help regulate their diet and continue to teach them which foods to avoid, especially those with hidden ingredients.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has joined with MedicAlert to bring about awareness of the Kid Smart program.

For more information, visit www.medicalert.org/kidsmart.