

# Why Are SERIOUS ALLERGIC REACTIONS on the Rise?

**A**llergies are a growing public health concern. The rate of food allergies among children has increased 18 percent from 1997 to 2007, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In some cases, an allergic reaction can be severe.

The body's immune system can overreact to an allergen in a potentially life-threatening way. This type of reaction is called anaphylaxis, which can be deadly.

Here's an overview of why cases of anaphylaxis may be on the rise.

## WE'VE CLEANED UP OUR ACT — TOO MUCH

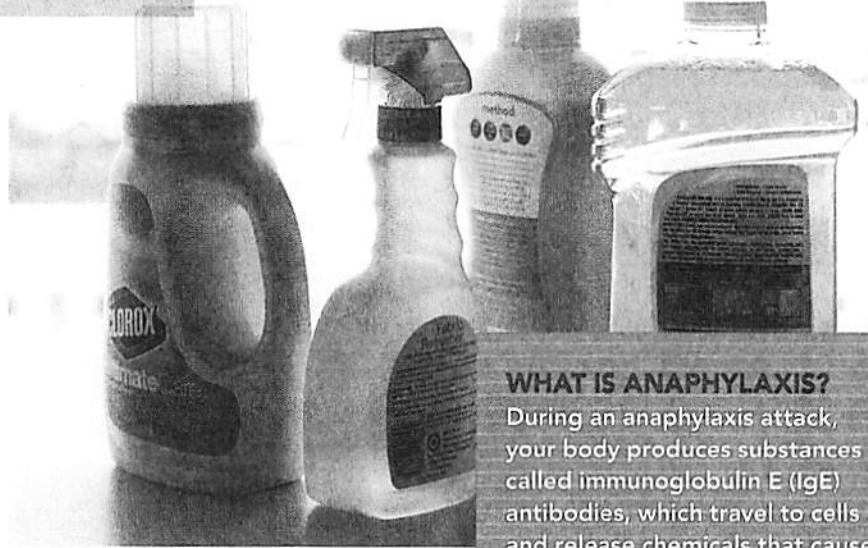
Some experts believe that our modern environment does not expose us to the germs that the immune system needs to develop properly. This theory is called hygiene hypothesis. Modern practices such as water supply sanitization and vaccinations reduce the body's contact with bacteria and viruses.

While those improvements help the public avoid sickness, they could be backfiring in some ways. The hygiene hypothesis maintains that as the immune system develops, it needs to be challenged with a mix of germs to learn how to work properly. Otherwise, the immune system may start to fight against substances that are not necessarily harmful, such as food.

## YOU MIGHT BE CREATING ALLERGIES BY AVOIDING THEM

Another medical theory suggests you may be increasing your children's risk of food allergy by keeping them away from potentially allergenic foods.

Until recently, pediatricians often advised parents to avoid giving their



children eggs until 24 months of age, or tree nuts and fish until age 3. But that advice has shifted. "It is quite remarkable how the advice we give to parents about food introduction has changed so dramatically," says Michael Frand, MD, of Focus On Kids Pediatrics.

The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends starting infants on solid food at 4 to 6 months of age. "Delaying solids after 6 months may promote the development of eczema and food allergies," says Dr. Frand. Potentially allergenic foods, such as fish, eggs and nuts, can be introduced any time after that.

"In fact, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology's statement on food allergy, the early introduction of allergenic foods may actually prevent food allergy in children," adds Dr. Frand. This may cut your child's risk of developing a food allergy later on.

## WHAT IS ANAPHYLAXIS?

During an anaphylaxis attack, your body produces substances called immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies, which travel to cells and release chemicals that cause an allergic reaction.

Anaphylaxis can restrict breathing and blood circulation, and is also likely to cause various symptoms, including:

- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Red, itchy rash
- Shortness of breath
- Stomach cramping
- Throat swelling
- Vomiting
- Wheezing

Food (especially nuts) is the most common cause of anaphylaxis. Studies show that food allergies may be responsible for up to 65 percent of all anaphylaxis cases. Insect stings, medications and latex can trigger anaphylaxis, too.

**TIP: PLAY  
IT SAFE!**

For children and adults with severe allergies, be prepared and carry an epinephrine auto-injector with you at all times.