

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting-Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2103 February 19

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## LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGIES IN SCHOOLS

### **Recommendation**

*It is recommended that the Report No. 026-13 re “Life-Threatening Allergies in Schools” be received for information.*

### **Key Points**

- Teaching regarding anaphylaxis prevention and management by Public Health Nurses in the elementary schools ensures compliance with [Sabrina’s Law](#).
- Partnering with school boards supports a Comprehensive School Health approach to the management of anaphylaxis for school-age children.

### **Background**

Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that may end in death and must always be considered a medical emergency requiring immediate treatment. It is a growing public health issue. The exact prevalence is not known, but it has been estimated that 1-2% of Canadians are at risk for anaphylaxis from food and insect allergies.

[Sabrina’s Law](#) was passed in January of 2006 in Ontario. It came into being following the death of a young girl, Sabrina, at her school. She had a life-threatening allergy to dairy products and accidentally came into contact with this allergen. Her epinephrine auto-injector containing the life-saving medication that she needed was locked in her locker and could not be reached in time.

### **Role of Health Unit Staff**

Sabrina’s law requires every school board to establish and maintain an anaphylaxis policy, the contents of which are outlined in the legislations. Public Health Nurses work in partnership with school boards to address three of the policy requirements as follows:

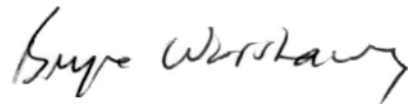
1. Strategies to reduce the risk of exposure to the allergen in the classroom and common areas of the school.
2. Develop a communication plan to disseminate information on life-threatening allergies to those who need the information.
3. Provide regular training to staff, volunteers and others in regular contact with the student (e.g. teachers, lunch monitors, bus drivers) regarding how to deal with anaphylaxis.

### Action Taken in Middlesex-London

Public Health Nurses on the Child Health Team provide annual education regarding anaphylaxis to school staff, lunchroom supervisors, school bus drivers, day camp counselors and others in regular contact with school-age children. As a part of the education session, all participants are required to demonstrate to the Public Health Nurse that they know how to use an epinephrine auto-injector trainer. For the current school year (2012-2013), 165 sessions were provided to 3,286 participants by Public Health Nurses in local schools. Evaluations of the session indicate that significant learning occurs and awareness of the dangers of anaphylaxis is heightened.

Handouts describing the common symptoms, action to be taken and how to use an epinephrine auto-injector are also provided to everyone and schools can access signs to post in their school requesting, for example, “No Nuts Please” or “No Scented Products Please”. There are also prepared inserts for school newsletters or websites and posters for health walls (bulletin boards maintained by the Public Health Nurse). Additionally, all of the resources have been translated into French.

This report was prepared by Ms. Roxanne Emery, Public Health Nurse, and Ms. Sue Schnurr, Acting Manager, Child and Youth Program Team.



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Acting Medical Officer of Health

**This report addresses** the Ontario Public Health Standards/Family Health Standards/Child Health/Board of Health Outcome at the Middlesex-London Health Unit.