

Childhood Allergies

An allergy is your body's reaction to a foreign substance. Allergic reactions can show up in the respiratory, skin, and digestive systems. Allergic reactions may include any of the following: hay fever, itchy or watery eyes, a runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, fever, headache, body aches, wheezing, difficulty breathing, cough, a skin rash, eczema, hives, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Although the tendency to have an allergic reaction is inherited, specific allergies are not. So if you're allergic to feathers, don't assume that your child will be allergic to feathers, too. An allergic tendency continues throughout life, but your child's sensitivities and reactions may well change. During a child's first 18 months, food allergies are most common. Foods that often cause problems are: cow's milk, wheat, corn, tomatoes, soy, peanut butter, strawberries, and eggs. Children often outgrow food allergies by age six. Other causes of allergies include medications and particles in the air, such as pollen, smoke, house dust, mold or mildew, and animal dander. There is no cure for allergies, but some children improve naturally during their teenage years.

If either parent has a history of food allergies, make sure that the child is breastfed for at least the first six months. Children who are breastfed develop fewer food allergies than those who are not. After six months, gradually introduce solid foods into your child's diet, one at a time for at least four days before adding another. This will make it easier to detect specific allergies.

If your child has an allergy, the best way to treat it is by avoiding the substance that causes it. If that's impossible—as is the case with pollen—the symptoms may be treated with nonprescription antihistamines and decongestants.

If your child has signs of a severe allergic reaction—for example, difficulty breathing—especially soon after taking a drug, eating a food, or being stung by an insect, go to the Emergency Room immediately. If your child's symptoms are less severe but aren't relieved by nonprescription medications, you should call your medical professional. He or she may prescribe other treatments. Sometimes, allergy skin tests or another evaluation in the Allergy Department may be helpful. Allergy shots can help some types of allergies, but do not eliminate allergic sensitivity.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your or your unborn child's health and safety.