



Awareness, Avoidance and Action = Knowledge for Life **Food Allergy Awareness Week (May 11-17, 2008)**

This Food Allergy Awareness Week (FAAW), Anaphylaxis Australia calls on all Australians to be **A**ware about the serious nature of severe allergies, help sufferers **A**void dangerous situations and importantly, urge authorities to take **A**ction to address this growing public health issue.

One in 5 Australians suffer from at least one allergic condition, ranking Australia, together with New Zealand, as having the highest prevalence of allergic disorders in the developed world.¹

Maria Said, President of Anaphylaxis Australia, said that the increase in allergic disease (and food allergy in particular) is showing no sign of slowing and food allergy accounts for most of this rise². "The growth in food allergy is of real concern, particularly the increase in peanut and tree nut allergies," she said.

Peanuts are the leading (but not the only) cause of serious allergic reactions known as anaphylaxis³. Peanut allergy alone has doubled over a five year period⁴ and it is the most common cause of severe food related anaphylaxis and death in children.⁵

"Australians have come a long way in their **A**wareness and understanding of severe allergies and anaphylaxis, but we can't afford to be complacent. About 10 Australians die each year and thousands of others require emergency treatment as a result of anaphylactic reactions, which are largely preventable.

"People often say 'I don't have a food allergy so it doesn't affect me', however with around 85 percent of deaths as a result of anaphylaxis occurring outside of the home⁶, what we do each day can affect someone else who does have serious allergies," said Ms Said.

Adhering to food **A**voidance strategies such as particular food minimisation policies, washing hands after eating, not sharing food and taking care not to cross contaminate during food preparation or food service can help those with food allergies avoid being exposed to potentially lethal triggers accidentally.

Sufferers need to ensure they carry their EpiPen auto injector, which contains life saving adrenaline, and their Anaphylaxis Action Plan with them at all times. It is also crucial that their family, friends, carers or work colleagues know where it is and know how to use it.

"Governments need to take **A**ction now and recognise severe allergy as the public health issue it has become, and importantly, take into consideration the escalating prevalence and impact this will have on the future of this country," said Ms Said.

"We need nationwide mandatory legislation to create safer school and childcare environments; a register of anaphylaxis deaths; expansion and permanent funding of dedicated anaphylaxis educator programs; as well as funding for community based patient support organisations," she added.

Current predictions indicate that in just over 40 years the number of people with allergies will nearly double to 7.7 million⁷.

"Today most Australians already have to wait up to five months to see an allergy specialist - longer in some cases. We must act now and lay the groundwork to ensure access to expert allergy services now and into the future.

"There is a desperate need for funding to educate more specialists in this field, conduct research into the recent epidemic and develop prevention strategies".

"By putting these programs in place and continuing the education process, we can reduce the number of preventable deaths from anaphylaxis every year," said Ms Said.

For more information on **Allergies and Anaphylaxis** visit Anaphylaxis Australia at www.allergyfacts.org.au and the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) at www.allergy.org.au.

For further information or to arrange an interview with Maria Said, President of Anaphylaxis Australia please contact:

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Anaphylaxis Australia Inc is a non-profit Australian charity which was formed in 1993. AAI's mission is to increase awareness of anaphylaxis through education, research and support. The organisation works with health and teaching professionals, members of the food industry and all who are touched by life-threatening allergy so that, together, we can improve the quality of life of allergic Australians nationally. For more information visit the AAI website: www.allergyfacts.org.au or call 1300 728 000.

¹ Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy ASCIA – Economic Impact of Allergies 13 Nov 2007.

² JACI – Leanne M. Poulos, BMedSc (Hons), Anne-Marie Waters, Grad Dip Pop Hlth, Patricia K. Correll, MPH, Robert H. Loblay, PhD, and Guy B. Marks, PhD. Trends in hospitalizations for anaphylaxis, angioedema, and urticaria in Australia, 1993-1994 to 2004-2005.

³ RCH. IL de Silva, SS Mehr, D Tey, [MLK Tang](#). Pediatric anaphylaxis: a 5-year retrospective review. **Allergy** 2008 (In Press).

⁴ American Academy of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology, 2003.

⁵ JACI – Leanne M. Poulos, BMedSc (Hons), Anne-Marie Waters, Grad Dip Pop Hlth, Patricia K. Correll, MPH, Robert H. Loblay, PhD, and Guy B. Marks, PhD. Trends in hospitalizations for anaphylaxis, angioedema, and urticaria in Australia, 1993-1994 to 2004-2005.

⁶ S. Allan Bock, MS, Anne Munoz-Furlong, BA and Hugh A. Sampson, MD J Allergy Clin Immunol 2001;107:191-3.

⁷ ASCIA – Economic Impact of Allergies 13 Nov 2007.