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| Victorian Anaphylaxis Notification System |
| Food Safety Unit |

# Victorian coroner calls for change

On 1 November 2018, the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) implemented a Victorian Coroner’s recommendation that the department be notified of all anaphylaxis presentations at Victorian hospital emergency departments. The Victorian Coroner’s Inquiry findings and recommendations provided the catalyst for amendments to the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act* *2008* and associated regulations, requiring mandatory notification of anaphylaxis presentations at all public and private hospital emergency departments.

As part of the Victorian Anaphylaxis Notification System, Victorian hospitals are required to notify the department of all cases where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person presenting for treatment has anaphylaxis.

The Coroner’s recommendation was made in response to an inquiry into the death of a child from anaphylaxis. The anaphylaxis resulted from the child’s consumption of a packaged food product that failed to declare the presence of dairy. With no mechanism in place for hospitals to inform the department of allergen and anaphylaxis presentations, the department was not alerted to the non-compliant product being in the marketplace, and it remained on shelves for a further six weeks without the mandatory labelling.

# Year 1

In its first week of operation, the notification system identified an undeclared allergen in a packaged food. The department’s Food Safety Unit was able to initiate a product recall, promptly removing this product from the market and reducing the risk to members of the public with allergies.

With approximately 2,000 presentations of anaphylaxis to emergency departments every year, the new reporting system is expected to assist in reducing the risk of undeclared allergens in food in the marketplace, while providing a rich source of data to support future activities to address the growing public health issue of allergies.

# Mandatory anaphylaxis notifications

In cases where packaged food is implicated in an anaphylaxis presentation, the Food Safety Unit investigates to determine if there is a wider food safety risk requiring a product recall. If the case implicates food from a food premises that does not involve pre-packaged food, the case is referred to the relevant local council for investigation.

The notification system assists the department to identify packaged food products that may not be adequately labelled for allergen content. An Australian survey undertaken in 2018 found that 6.7 per cent of respondents with known allergies self-reported an anaphylaxis response to packaged foods where the allergen was not listed as an ingredient.

The following statistics were taken from the Food Safety Unit’s anaphylaxis notification records for 2019 and show how 60 per cent of the 2,060 reported anaphylaxis cases in 2019 were caused by food.

Number of notified anaphylaxis cases by suspected cause, Victoria, 2019

| Suspected cause | Number | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Blood derived product | 1 | <1 |
| Drug | 255 | 12 |
| Food – other | 420 | 20 |
| Food – packaged food | 368 | 18 |
| Food – unpackaged from food premises | 455 | 22 |
| Insect venom | 163 | 8 |
| Other cause | 71 | 3 |
| Unknown | 323 | 16 |
| Vaccine | 4 | <1  |
| **Grand total** | **2060** | **100** |

## Further information

Information about the [department’s anaphylaxis system](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/anaphylaxis-notifications) can be found at: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/anaphylaxis-notifications>.

Real-time data is available publicly through the departments’ [interactive infectious disease surveillance reporting system](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/infectious-diseases-surveillance/interactive-infectious-disease-reports): <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/infectious-diseases-surveillance/interactive-infectious-disease-reports>.

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