

Medical Information Sheet

Allergies, anaphylaxis and your fire role

January 2016

What is the situation?

The Fit for Fire program has been operating as a medical screening program within the department since 2009 to ensure staff are categorized appropriately into either a firefighting or a fire support role (the categories range from A-H). Allergies and allergic reactions have been screened as part of this process since the beginning of the program, however in 2013 a risk assessment identified the need to obtain a diagnosis and the severity of the individual's condition.

How is severity determined?

Further information will be sought from the individual's treating practitioner to determine the following factors:

- The type of allergen exposure e.g. insect/ food
- Recent allergic reactions including the symptoms experienced with the reaction
- The need for medical intervention/prevention

Based on the above assessment and any other relevant information, the department's medical provider will then determine the most suitable fire role category .

What are allergies and anaphylaxis?

Allergy is an immune response to a normally harmless substance to most people (often referred to as an 'allergen'). People can be allergic to many things such as pollens, insect stings, medication, food, latex etc. Allergic disease includes conditions such as a reaction to food, insect, medication, chemicals, eczema allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and allergic asthma.

Allergies can be mild, moderate or severe (anaphylaxis). An individual's treating practitioner will determine whether an Allergy or Anaphylaxis Action Plan is required. (Source: Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia, 2016)

Anaphylaxis is the most severe type of allergy and should always be treated as a medical emergency. Anaphylaxis occurs after exposure to an allergen (usually to foods, insects, chemicals or medicines), to which a person is severely allergic. Not all people with allergies are at risk of anaphylaxis. (Source: ASCIA, 2015)

Key Message

- Allergies and fire roles are managed on a case by case basis.
- Individual history and symptoms will be taken into consideration.
- The individual's treating practitioner is integral in providing valuable information to undertake the risk assessment.
- The department's medical provider uses this information and any other relevant information to determine the appropriate fire role category (A-H) the individual can perform.
- It is imperative that employees disclose their allergy during their Fit for Fire medical assessment and to their line manager.
- Diagnosed cases of allergies must be supported by the appropriately signed Action Plan (Allergy or Anaphylaxis) from an individual's treating practitioner.

This information flier is not a comprehensive guide for management of Allergies. Further information on allergies can be found at www.allergyfacts.org.au or contact fireandemergencymedicalstandards@delwp.vic.gov.au



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