

Epinephrine Auto-Injectors Know How to Use EpiPen and Twinject Properly

SafeMedicationUse.ca has received the following report about an error made when using an epinephrine auto-injector (EpiPen).

A student who was experiencing a severe allergic reaction went to the school office for help. A teacher was about to give the student a dose of epinephrine when the student noticed that the teacher had placed a finger over the needle end of the auto-injector. Fortunately, the student was able to stop the teacher, and then make sure that the injection was given correctly.

An anaphylactic reaction (also known as anaphylaxis) is a serious allergic reaction that can come on quickly and may cause death. A food allergy is the most common cause of anaphylactic reactions. It is estimated that 6% of children in North America have some form of food allergy. Severe allergies to insect stings, medicines or latex can also lead to anaphylactic reactions.

When an anaphylactic reaction happens, it is important for the person to get medical help quickly. The medicine epinephrine is used to treat anaphylaxis and should be given as soon as possible. This drug may slow down the reaction and can give the person more time to get help. Epinephrine is given by injection, and it comes in a special auto-injector device to make the injection process easier. When used correctly, the device injects the proper dose of epinephrine. Two brands of auto-injector are available in Canada: EpiPen (made by Dey Pharma L.P) and Twinject (made by Shionogi Pharma).

People who know they are at risk of anaphylaxis should always carry an epinephrine auto-injector with them and should know how to use it. During a reaction, the affected person may not be able

Epinephrine auto-injectors available in Canada



Original EpiPen



New EpiPen



Twinject auto-injector

to give the injection herself, so family members, friends, babysitters, and teachers must also understand how to use the auto-injector properly.

The design of the EpiPen auto-injector was recently changed to make it easier to use. Even so, performing an injection may still be confusing for someone who is not familiar with the device. Training devices are available for both EpiPen and Twinject. These can be used to safely learn how to use the auto-injectors.

Anaphylaxis is a growing health concern in Canada. If you have a severe allergy that requires you to have epinephrine available, learn how to use your auto-injector device. Show family members, friends or anyone else who might need to give you an injection how to use the device. If your child has a severe allergy, be sure that anyone who cares for your child knows how to use the device. Remember that epinephrine auto-injectors always have an expiry date. It is important to check this regularly, and replace the auto-injector if it is outdated.

If you know someone with severe allergies, take the time to learn what to do if they have an anaphylactic reaction. Ask to practice with the auto-injector training device, or check out the company websites below for more information. Knowing what to do may help you to save a life.

Websites for information on epinephrine auto-injectors

EpiPen: www.epipen.ca
Twinject: www.twinject.ca