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SEVERE ALLERGIC REACTIONS – FAILURE TO CARRY EMERGENCY MEDICATION PUTTING LIVES AT RISK

According to new research released today a concerning number of Australians who suffer severe allergic reactions may be placing themselves at risk by not carrying emergency medication with them which raises concerns about lack of education, access to specialist care, and complacency among people who are at risk of severe allergic reactions.

Published in the Pfizer Australia Health Report, the findings reveal that 44 percent of Australians report some form of allergy, and 51 percent of this group experience moderate or severe symptoms. Of the seven percent who experience severe reactions (anaphylaxis), fewer than half carry with them emergency medication or have an anaphylaxis action plan, which provides instruction on how to treat anaphylaxis.

According to Associate Professor Dominic Mallon, President of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology & Allergy, these findings are concerning because they suggest that those with severe allergies may not be taking the precautions necessary to safeguard their health in an emergency situation.

“Anaphylaxis can be life threatening and it is important for people who are at risk of anaphylaxis to have the correct medication on hand and know how to use it. If they have concerns about how best to do this, they should consult their specialist,” Associate Professor Mallon explained.

The research also revealed the extent to which allergic conditions can affect the lives of sufferers with significant impacts being felt on quality of life and work productivity. One in three (34 percent) respondents reported that their quality of life is affected by their allergy and one in four reported that it affects their sleeping patterns and causes tiredness during the day. In addition one in four said that they can sometimes feel down as a result of their allergy.

The impact of allergies also extends into the workplace with 52 percent of sufferers experiencing their symptoms at work and 76 percent of those reporting that their ability to do their job effectively is reduced as a result.

“If your allergy is aggravated by being in a certain environment such as your workplace you should consult your doctor or specialist who can help identify what your allergies are and prescribe appropriate treatments to help reduce and manage your symptoms,” Associate Professor Mallon advised.



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Despite the large number of people reporting allergic symptoms, only half of these (one in five of all Australians) have had an allergy test in their life time to determine what is causing their symptoms.

Seventy five percent of Australians with allergies have received treatment or diagnosis from their doctor and 37 percent have also consulted a pharmacist about their symptoms.

"Most allergies can be easily managed and it's encouraging to learn that Australians are consulting their local health care professionals about what treatment is best for them. It's equally important however that the advice they receive reflects best practice and that people heed the advice they are given to ensure they effectively manage their symptoms," added Associate Professor Mallon.

"The majority of symptoms are treated with over the counter antihistamines, which are effective but do not address the underlying cause. Only one percent of people surveyed received desensitisation for their allergies which, for the most common allergies is the only treatment that specifically treats the underlying problem," noted Associate Professor Mallon.

The independent survey was conducted by Stollznow Research in December 2007 and based on responses from 1,562 Australians.

The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (www.allergy.org.au) has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to assist with raising the awareness of the effective identification and treatment of allergic diseases through this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report.

Free copies of the Health Report can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts for future editions.

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NB: Interviews are available with The President of Anaphylaxis Australia Maria Said and ASCIA President, Associate Professor Dominic Mallon

**For more information or to organise and interview please contact Hausmann Communications: Rosemary Biggs (02) 8353 5736 or 0415 319 862
Kristal Rix (02) 8353 5718 or 0410 428 150**

