

## Dogs in school allergy guidance

To be read in conjunction with our allergy to animals fact sheet [Animals in school factsheet](#). This guidance is specifically about managing allergy; schools should refer to other sources for the use of the dog in school and for dog welfare.

### Therapy dogs

Schools are increasingly using therapy dogs to support children. Dog (or other animal) allergies can sometimes lead to serious allergic reactions, so schools need to plan for how to manage potential allergies safely. This approach is preferable to excluding therapy dogs altogether due to the benefits they can provide to students. Schools should complete a risk assessment and take steps to reduce any risks before introducing an animal into the school.

### What causes an allergy to dogs and other animals?

People who have an allergy to dogs or other animals are sensitive to proteins in their saliva, urine, or dander (the dead skin cells which are shed as flakes of skin). Although fur is commonly considered to be responsible for the allergy, it's usually the dander or saliva that collects on the fur that is the root cause.

In people with a dog (animal) allergy, the body's immune system wrongly identifies the proteins as a threat. When this happens the body releases chemicals, including histamine, in response. It is the release of these chemicals that cause allergy symptoms.

It's possible to develop an allergy to animals at any time, even if you've been able to be around animals without any problems in the past.

Animal allergies are more common in people with hay fever or asthma.

## 'Hypoallergenic' dogs

Although the name suggests that 'hypoallergenic' dogs are safe for people with allergies, it's not possible to remove the risk completely. Some breeds do produce a greater quantity of allergens, but all breeds of dog produce dander and saliva, so no breed can be classed as truly hypoallergenic.

Shorter-haired dogs may be lower risk as they produce less dander and shed fur or dander less often, however, it's still possible to have allergic reactions to them.

## Symptoms of dog (animal) allergy

Dog (animal) allergens can cause symptoms in the eyes, nose, skin and airways. For example, if a dog is stroked and then the face is touched, there may be symptoms in the eyes and nose. If someone's skin is licked or scratched by the dog, there may be a skin reaction. If the proteins get into the air and are breathed in, symptoms in the throat and airways can be caused.

Symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Itchy or watery eyes and nose
- An itchy rash
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest tightness
- Wheezing, which can be severe

If a child has eczema, it might make their eczema worse.

Reactions can occur in children who have been sitting on the floor where a dog has previously been, as the dander can transfer to their clothing, hands and then their skin.

If a child has asthma as well as a dog (animal) allergy, they might also have asthma attacks and their lung function may get worse.

Should a reaction occur, the child's allergy action plan should be followed, the parents/carers notified, the incident recorded, and the risk assessment reviewed.

## Balancing therapy dogs and allergy

Dog fur and allergens can get everywhere because they can cling to clothes, shoes, fabrics and surfaces, which can make them hard to avoid.

It may help to:

- Keep windows open whenever possible
- Clean rooms regularly
- Maintain good hand hygiene for everyone interacting with the dog, especially the owner (handler) to minimise cross contamination onto other surfaces after stroking the dog
- Ensure that the dog is groomed, and nails clipped regularly
- Try and keep the dog in areas with hard floors instead of carpets for easier cleaning

Children with dog allergy should avoid contact with the dog and the places that the dog visits.

A risk assessment should be undertaken that details the control measures that will be used to keep children (and adults) with dog allergies safe. This may be standalone or included as part of the school's dog risk assessment.

Additionally, it is recommended that schools who have resident or visiting therapy dogs have the following:

- Consent from the Headteacher that the dog may attend school.
- Set days and times when the dog will be present.
- A set area where the dog is based (including its bed).
- Parents/carers need to be informed by letter that a therapy dog will be in school.

The letter should:

- Make it clear that consent for interaction is assumed to be given unless informed otherwise.
- Make it clear that parents/carers must inform the school if their child has an allergy to animal fur or another medical condition that prevents their interaction with the dog.
- Provide parents/carers with the contact details for the person they should raise any questions or concerns with.



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- Parents/carers who have notified school of an allergy should expect school to provide information on how the risk will be managed and an agreed plan put in place.
- Parents/carers should be informed how to give or rescind permission.
- Parents/carers and staff should be made aware of the areas of school that will be kept dog free so that any allergic person can remain clear of any dog allergens.
- Children's individual risk assessments and or individual health care plans will include interactions/exclusions with the therapy dog and how they will be managed.
- A schedule for enhanced cleaning to be undertaken to manage and limit the dog allergens in the school should be developed and issued to cleaning staff.
- Visitors to school should be notified that there is a therapy dog in school and meetings should not be held that include the therapy dog without prior consent. Consideration should be given to the meeting room, ensuring that an allergen free room is available if needed.
- Consideration should be given to adding the use of the therapy dog to the school prospectus and website.

## Further information

There is further information and free resources to support managing allergies in school on our Safer Schools Programme: [Safer schools programme](#). For schools who want to ensure that their staff have a good knowledge of allergy management, there is a low priced, evidence-based training course [AllergyWise for Schools](#).

## Feedback

Please help us to improve our information resources by sending us your feedback at: <https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/information-resources-feedback/>

## Sources

All the information we produce is evidence based or follows expert opinion and is checked by our clinical and research reviewers. If you wish to know the sources we used



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in producing any of our information products, please contact [info@anaphylaxis.org.uk](mailto:info@anaphylaxis.org.uk) and we will gladly supply details.

## Reviewer

The content of this factsheet has been peer-reviewed by Heather Saunders, Head of School at Palladian Academy Trust and owner of a therapy dog that works in Westwood with Iford and Churchfields the Village schools.

## Disclosures

We are not aware of any conflicts of interest in relation to the review of this factsheet.

## Disclaimer

The information provided in this factsheet is given in good faith. Every effort is taken to ensure accuracy. All patients are different, and specific cases need specific advice. There is no substitute for good medical advice provided by a medical professional.

## About Anaphylaxis UK

Anaphylaxis UK is the only UK-wide charity solely focused on supporting people at risk of serious, life-threatening allergic reactions. We provide information and support to people living with allergies through our free national helpline. We also fundraise to achieve our ultimate aim, to create a safer environment for all people at risk of serious allergies. Visit our website [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk) and follow us to keep up-to-date with our latest news. We're on Facebook @anaphylaxisUK, LinkedIn, Instagram @anaphylaxisUK, Twitter @AnaphylaxisUK and YouTube.