

## Allergic reaction kills Esquimalt teenager

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A high-spirited 13-year-old Esquimalt girl died Thursday after she had a severe allergic reaction to a burrito. The drug that might have saved her life was sitting in her school locker.

Carley Kohnen, who had allergies to foods including dairy products and peanuts, ordered a burrito and a doughnut from a food outlet at a shopping centre. Her parents said that according to Carley's friends, she asked if the food was free of the proteins to which she was allergic and was told that it was.

The only child of Chris Kohnen, 56, and Brenda, 47, went to Summit Park with her friends and soon afterwards went into anaphylactic shock. Unable to breathe, she fell unconscious.

"She ate it and about 30 minutes after playing [with her friends] that was it," said Chris Kohnen yesterday. "I always had this fear. Up until a few years ago, she was with us 24/7."

By 4:05 p.m. she was in distress. Her friends called 911. Bystanders rushed to her aid and paramedics worked feverishly for about an hour to revive the girl, according to the coroner's office. But she was pronounced dead at 5:36 p.m.

"It's sudden and unexpected, but not unnatural death," said coroner Rose Stanton.

The bubbly teen was a Grade 8 student at Lansdowne Middle School. She played everything from soccer to field hockey and maintained good grades, her parents said. She knew to always carry her EpiPen -- a needle holding the life-saving drug epinephrine. But she didn't have it that day.

Chris Kohnen said you can't put your children in a bubble, and can only educate them as much as possible and hope for the best. "But death to them isn't real. They're indestructible and think it will never happen to them."

Her parents told her to never try a new food without gaining permission from them first. They read every package that went into making her food. Still, it wasn't enough. She was a teenager, said her parents, and she longed to eat the same foods others kids seemingly enjoyed.

About two per cent of the population is at risk for anaphylactic reactions and about 50 people in Canada die from such episodes each year.

Dr. Peter Lee, an immunologist and allergist, said those 50 deaths are "totally preventable" and more tragic for that reason.

"It just shouldn't happen at all," Lee said.



CREDIT: Darren Stone, Times Colonist  
Chris Kohnen holds a photo of his 13-year-old daughter, Carley, who died of anaphylactic shock after suffering a severe allergic reaction to a burrito she ate while out with friends.

Having suffered from allergies and asthma since eight months old, Carley took preventative medication each day for asthma and she was well-monitored. But of late she had fewer allergic episodes and perhaps became a bit too confident or complacent, her father said.

Her asthma could have contributed to the severity of her allergic reaction Thursday, according to health professionals.

Margaret Eastman, a clinical nurse in the field of asthma and allergies who works at Victoria General Hospital, stressed yesterday that anyone with severe food allergies should always read food labels, carry an EpiPen and instruct family, friends and close contacts how to supervise or give an emergency injection.

People with such allergies should also wear medical bracelets or necklaces, she said.

Brenda Kohnen had retired from Scotiabank. Chris Kohnen was supposed to be enjoying his first official day of retirement yesterday -- having worked as branch manager for HSBC finance in Gateway Village. Instead, he was driving back and forth to the funeral home and writing his daughter's obituary.

Above all else, the girl's grieving mother wanted to tell parents: "Hug your child today, and tell them you love them."

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