Vasovagal Episode or Anaphylaxis

Immunisation providers must be able to distinguish between a vasovagal episode (fainting) and anaphylaxis

Vasovagal episodes (fainting) is relatively common after vaccination of adults and adolescents, but infants and children rarely faint

Anaphylaxis following routine vaccination is very rare, but can be fatal

Vasovagal episode	Anaphylaxis
Onset	
> immediate – usually within minutes of vaccine administration	> usually within 15 minutes, but can occur within hours of vaccine administration
Skin	
> generalised pallor, cool clammy skin	> skin itchiness > generalised skin erythema (redness), urticaria (wheals) > angioedema (localised oedema of the deeper layers of the skin or subcutaneous tissues)
Respiratory	
> normal respiration; may be shallow, but not laboured	> cough, wheeze, stridor > signs of respiratory distress (tachypnoea, cyanosis, rib recession) > marked respiratory compromise from upper airway oedema/bronchospasm
Cardiovascular	
> bradycardia – but with strong central pulse (eg carotid) > hypotension – usually transient and corrects in supine position	> tachycardia, weak/absent central pulse > hypotension – sustained and no improvement without specific treatment
Neurological	
> feels faint, light-headed > loss of consciousness – improves once supine or head down position	> Sense of severe anxiety and distress > Loss of consciousness - no improvement once supine or head down position

Sudden loss of consciousness in young children should be presumed to be an anaphylactic reaction, particularly if a strong pulse is absent. A strong central pulse (eg carotid) persists during a vasovagal episode (fainting) or convulsion.

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