



Official Release

Rescue Helicopter Crew's Rapid Response Saves Father from Life-Threatening Reaction

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A Hawke's Bay family is crediting the swift response of emergency services and the Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter Service with saving the life of a local father after a sudden and severe allergic reaction rapidly turned life-threatening.

Livestock driver and father of four, Thomas McKenzie suffered a rapid anaphylactic reaction after taking prescribed antibiotics for a dental infection in February. What began as a routine evening at home quickly escalated into a critical medical emergency, with his airway closing and his condition deteriorating by the second.

His wife, Haylee, said the situation became frightening almost immediately.

"I could see he was getting worse very quickly...his throat began to close and he struggled to speak between breaths. It was terrifying to watch," she said.

Emergency services were called, however ambulances were approximately 45 minutes away. With Thomas's condition worsening, first responders - including local fire crews - recognised the severity of the situation and requested urgent support from the rescue helicopter.

Within minutes of being tasked by Air Desk, the Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter Service arrived at the Waipukurau aerodrome where the crew joined ambulance staff on the ground. Together, they provided critical treatment, including emergency medication, before stabilising Thomas for urgent air transfer to hospital.

Thanks to the coordinated response and rapid intervention, Thomas survived. He was treated in resuscitation, monitored in ICU overnight, and discharged home the following day. He has since been diagnosed with a penicillin allergy and now carries an EpiPen on him wherever he goes.

The close call has left Thomas' wife Haylee deeply grateful for the teams involved in his care.

“The biggest thank you ever possible. They really are the reason I still have my husband, and most importantly, our children still have their Daddy.”

The family says the experience has reinforced the importance of emergency aeromedical services in rural regions, where transport times can be critical.

“Emergency helicopter services are not just important - they are lifesaving. When time is critical and help is far away, they make all the difference,” Haylee said.

The incident highlights the ongoing need for public support for organisations such as the Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust, which relies on community funding for each and every mission.

Hawke's Bay's Rescue Helicopter conducts around 400 lifesaving missions every year – made possible through essential Government funding combined with the generous support of local communities who provide grants, sponsorship and donations to sustain operations and assist in purchasing key equipment.

ENDS.

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