

## Drug Allergy Testing - Patient Information Sheet

You have been invited to attend our drug allergy clinic. This will normally include allergy skin tests and then a challenge test, usually as 2 separate appointments.

### Why do I need this test?

These tests are offered when allergy to a drug is suspected and the drug in question has become important for you.

For example:

- You have avoided penicillin since childhood and now get infections that don't respond so well to other antibiotics
- You have had an allergic reaction during an operation or other procedure where multiple drugs were given simultaneously. Allergy testing can help to identify which drug caused the reaction.

### Where and when will this take place?

Challenge tests are done in the Allergy Clinic (Hawthorn House, Heartlands Hospital)). You will receive a letter to confirm your exact appointment time and location.

### What will happen?

After you arrive, a doctor, or specialist nurse will explain the process in detail and ask you to sign a consent form. The exact procedure depends on the drug/s being tested. Your blood pressure, pulse rate and peak flow (a measurement of lung function) will be measured and we check that you are well in yourself and any underlying conditions, (particularly asthma) are well controlled.

### Skin tests

We usually begin with allergy skin prick tests. This involves putting small drops of the medicine on the surface of the skin and lightly pricking through the drop with a tiny lancet. If a raised itchy weal develops, this is a positive skin test, likely to indicate allergy to the medicine. If no weal develops, we may then proceed to intradermal testing, injecting tiny volumes (less than 0.05ml) under the surface of the skin. This will sting a bit and raises a small weal in the skin. We measure this weal immediately and then 20 minutes later. If the weal has increased in diameter by 3 mm or more, this is a positive test.

### Challenge tests

This may take place on the same day as the skin test or at a separate appointment. You will be given the suspect drug. For some challenges, a single dose is used but for others gradually increasing amounts are given over a longer period of time.

At certain intervals the nurse, or doctor will repeat the blood pressure, pulse rate and peak flow measurements and ask how you are feeling. This is to assess whether you are reacting. After the final stage, you will remain under observation in the clinic for at least 1 hour. The whole process may take up to 4 hours.

## Information for Patients

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If at any point you have an allergic reaction the challenge is stopped and appropriate treatment given. This is called a **POSITIVE CHALLENGE**. If you reach the maximum dose of the drug and have no symptoms or change in your measurements this is called a **NEGATIVE CHALLENGE**.

If the drug is only available as an injection into a vein (IV) or into a joint (intra-articular), we will advise your specialist team on carrying out an IV or intra-articular challenge procedure in the specialist unit.

Finally, if you are being tested for antibiotic allergy you may be asked to take a short course of antibiotics at home. This is to make sure you do not have delayed reactions. We will review you within 72 hours, either by telephone or in person.

### How safe is the procedure?

Allergy skin tests use tiny amounts of the drug, usually diluted. This means that you are exposed to a far smaller amount of the drug than if you were given a full injection or oral dose of medication. Challenge tests are done to rule out allergy, usually after negative skin tests, so the risk should be low. However as you will be given something you might be allergic to, there is a small risk of an allergic reaction which could be severe. This is why these tests are carried out by the specialist allergy team and done in hospital where immediate emergency medical treatment is available.

### Do I need to do anything to prepare?

Before the appointment: Stop all antihistamines for 5 days before the appointment. Do not stop other medications unless advised by a doctor. Please let us know about any other medications you are taking as soon as possible as some medications may need to be stopped before your appointment.

On the day of the appointment: Eat a normal meal before you come to the clinic. Bring along something to do or read.

If you are unwell before or on the day of your skin tests/challenge please telephone us to change your appointment. We will normally not proceed with the test if you are unwell. If you have asthma, it is very important that your asthma is stable and well controlled before you undergo a challenge test. Please contact us for advice if you are at all unsure about this.

### What if I don't want the test?

You can choose not to have the tests at all, or to stop at any point during the procedure. If we are not able to complete your tests we will advise you to continue to avoid the medication/s in question. This may limit your options for future surgery or other procedures/treatments.

### If I have any other questions or concerns before the procedure:

Please contact the Allergy team on 0121 424 1807/0121 424 2169 if you have any other questions or concerns.

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email [patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk).