Allergy tests, skin prick tests and specific IgE blood tests

There are two types of allergy tests, skin prick tests and blood tests.

Your consultant or nurse specialist will decide which tests are necessary by looking at your child’s allergy history.

An allergen is the name given to the substance causing an allergy, for example a food or pollen. There are other tests that can tell us about your child’s allergy and asthma.

Skin prick testing
Skin prick testing is a safe and simple procedure and can help to tell us if your child is at risk of an immediate allergy.

Antihistamines
It is important to stop all antihistamines before the skin prick test as they will interfere with the results. Please stop all medicines containing antihistamine four days before your allergy clinic appointment.

However, if your child really needs to take them or you are in doubt about if the medicine your child is taking contains antihistamine, phone us on 023 8079 4075 a week before their appointment for advice.

Skin prick tests are performed by our specially trained children’s nurses who are used to caring for infants and children.

The nurse will mark your child’s forearm using a special pen and place a small droplet of each allergen solution next to it. Then a small pin is used to scratch the skin through each droplet. It is a bit like being pressed lightly with a ballpoint pen, your child will feel it but it is not painful, although it may cause some itchiness.

When the test has been completed, the solutions are wiped from the skin. There is a 15 minute wait before the results can be read.

If the test is positive, a white itchy spot or wheal (a white raised lump) will appear after 15 minutes. The size of the wheal is measured with a special ruler and recorded and then passed to the doctor or specialist nurse for interpretation.

The size of the wheal does not indicate the severity of symptoms. The test tells us which allergens may be causing your child’s symptoms.

Skin prick testing is a very safe procedure, however if a reaction occurs, like itchy skin or swelling it will be treated immediately with oral antihistamine.

After the allergy test, the doctor or nurse will give you advice and information based on your child’s test results.
**Specific IgE blood tests**
Sometimes, it is not possible to do skin prick tests on a child, for example if they have taken antihistamines in the days before the test or if they have bad eczema.

In these cases, a blood test can provide similar information because it is possible to detect an allergy antibody to a food or pollen in the blood; this is known as specific IgE.

If you or your child wishes, we can use an anaesthetic cream which will numb the skin for a while and help to reduce the discomfort of the blood test. Very occasionally a bruise may appear in the area where the blood has been taken from.

**A food challenge**
Sometimes, skin prick tests or specific IgE blood tests do not give us a clear answer and further tests are needed to establish whether a child is allergic to a particular food. It is in these cases that a food challenge is needed.

They are also useful to see whether or not a child has grown out of their allergy.

Food challenges are done in hospital and involve giving increasing quantities of the food to the child, while watching very closely for any sign of allergic reactions.

The challenge starts with tiny amounts and works up slowly as they are tolerated. If a reaction occurs it is treated immediately to prevent it developing into a severe reaction.

If a reaction does not occur, even when larger amounts of food are given, then the child is not allergic and the food can be reintroduced to your child’s diet.

Food challenges are safe as long as they are done in the right place, by the right people.

Your child will be invited to come to the John Atwell day ward where we have special facilities for children. Specialist allergy nurses and doctors will be there.

This is done on a separate day from your child’s clinic appointment.

**Remember!**
Be prepared - carry your rescue medicines (antihistamine and adrenaline pens) with you at all times. Make sure your friends and family know what to do if you have an allergic reaction.

**If you have any questions or concerns please contact**
The children’s allergy team at Southampton General Hospital
Clinic: 023 8079 4335 Day ward: 023 8079 4511
Email: childrensallergy@uhs.nhs.uk Website: www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrensallergy

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.