

Allergy tests - skin prick tests and specific IgE blood tests

Information for patients, parents and guardians

There are two types of allergy tests - skin prick tests and blood tests. Both tests will detect whether your child is allergic to a specific allergen (the substance causing an allergy, for example a food or pollen). This factsheet explains what will happen at your child's allergy test appointment. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our allergy team.

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

Skin prick testing

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

Skin prick tests are performed by our specially trained children's nurses.

We will mark your child's forearm using a special pen and place a small droplet of each allergen solution next to it. We will then prick the skin through each droplet using a small pin. This will feel similar to being pressed lightly with a ballpoint pen. It is not painful, but it may cause some itchiness.

When we have finished the test, we will wipe the solutions from your child's skin. We will be able to read the results after 15 minutes.

If the test is positive, a white, itchy spot or wheal (a white, raised lump) will appear. We will measure the size of the wheal with a special ruler. We will then pass the results on to the doctor or nurse specialist for interpretation.

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

After the allergy test, we will give you advice and information based on your child's test results.

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 child's allergy clinic appointment.

However, if your child really needs to take them, or you are in doubt about whether the medicine your child is taking contains antihistamine, please phone us on **023 8120 4075** a week before their appointment for advice.

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 four days before the test or if they have bad eczema. In these cases, we may carry out a specific IgE blood test. This test detects an allergy antibody to a food or pollen in the blood (known as specific IgE).

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

Food challenge

Occasionally 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 or if they have grown out of their allergy. It is in these cases that a food challenge is needed.

Food challenges are carried out in hospital and involve giving increasing amounts of a specific food to your child, while watching very closely for any sign of an allergic reaction.

We will start the challenge using a tiny amount of food and then slowly increase the amount as it is tolerated. If a reaction occurs, we will treat it immediately to prevent it developing into a severe reaction. If a reaction does not occur, even when larger amounts of food are given, then your child is not allergic and the food can be reintroduced to your child's diet.

The challenge will take place in the John Atwell day ward where we have special facilities for children. The challenge will be performed by a specialist allergy nurse or doctor. Please note that this challenge will be on a separate day from your child's clinic appointment.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our children's allergy team.

Clinic

Telephone: **023 8120 4335**

Day ward

Telephone: **023 8120 4511**

Email: childrensallergy@uhs.nhs.uk

Website: www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrensallergy

For a translation of this document, or a version in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **023 8120 4688**.

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalneeds

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