

Patient information factsheet

Drug allergy patch testing

This factsheet provides information about skin patch testing for drug allergies. It explains the purpose of this type of test and what you can expect during and after your appointment. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is patch testing?

Drug patch testing is a type of test that can try to identify allergies to medications (drugs). The test involves putting a small amount of drug in petroleum jelly or water and taping it on your skin, usually on your arm or back – this is kept on the same area for 48 hours. After that, you will monitor the area for up to one week. You need to look out for any reaction, like a raised red area, which could indicate an allergy. This can vary based on the type of reaction you experienced after taking the drug previously.

Patch testing can try to identify which drug was possibly the cause of the rash you had previously experienced, including but not limited to:

- **Maculopapular drug allergy reactions:** This type of rash features both flat and raised lesions on the skin.
- **Drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS):** This is a rare but serious allergic reaction to a medication that can cause a skin rash, fever and, in some cases, affect internal organs.
- **Stevens-Johnson Syndrome (SJS) or Toxic epidermal necrolysis (TEN):** This rare but severe reaction can affect the eyes and skin and, in some cases, affect internal organs. It is typically triggered by certain medications but can also be caused by infections.

What patch testing cannot detect

Patch testing is not used to detect the following types of allergic reactions:

- urticaria (hives)
- angioedema (sudden swelling that is often caused without a cause or, in some cases, from an allergic reaction)
- anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction that can make it hard to breathe).

If you have had these types of allergic reactions, please tell us, as you may not be suitable for drug patch testing.

What are the risks of patch testing?

You may get some redness with itching at the test site (your arm or back), but this is normal. In rare cases, the test can cause a more severe reaction, such as:

- redness spreading beyond the test site
- blistering

- prolonged rash with colour change (darker or lighter) of skin at the test site
- recurrence of previous reaction experienced

If this happens, contact us immediately using the details you have been provided at the appointment.

What to expect on the day of your procedure

We will talk you through the procedure, explain the risks and benefits of having drug patch testing, and answer any questions you may have. We will then ask you to sign a consent form. Signing this form means that you understand the procedure and agree to have it.

The testing is performed as an outpatient. While the procedure only takes several minutes, we would review the history of the previous reaction as well as any photographs you may have at the appointment. The appointment may therefore take up to an hour.

How should I prepare for patch testing?

Before your patch test, please follow these instructions:

- Do not apply creams or ointments to your arms on the day of the test.
- Do not take antihistamines (allergy medication) or oral steroids (a type of medication that reduces swelling and inflammation) for at least 48 hours before the test unless your doctor says otherwise.

What will happen during patch testing?

1. Small amounts of medicines will be applied to your back or arm using small stickers called patches.
2. You will need to keep these patches on for 48 hours.
 - During this time, avoid activities that will make you sweat or wet the test site, such as bathing, showering, or heavy exercise.
 - Wear loose clothing so the patches do not get accidentally removed.
3. Depending on the type of reaction you have, we may:
 - ask you to attend further appointments to review the area, either after 48 hours or after 7 days, or
 - ask you to send photographs to the email address we will give you at your first appointment.

Mild discomfort

You may feel mild itching or discomfort under the patches. Do not scratch the test site, as this can affect the results.

What will happen after patch testing?

After your final reading, if there are any clear and certain reactions on testing, we will inform you of what drugs to avoid.

In some cases, tests can be falsely negative because your skin may not absorb the medicines well enough, and it may not be possible to determine what drug you are allergic to. If testing is negative, you would have to continue avoiding the suspected drugs. In some cases, follow-up appointments may be needed to perform further testing.

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Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your patch testing, please contact our clinic at:

Dermatology department

Level E

Fanshawe Wing

Royal South Hants Hospital

Southampton

SO14 0YG

Telephone: **023 8120 2871** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm)

Email: dermppc@uhs.nhs.uk

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