

Having a skin prick allergy test against airborne allergens

Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT)/ Allergy Clinic

Produced: April 2021

Review: April 2024

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 186 Version: 2

Why am I having a skin prick test?

Allergic rhinitis is inflammation of the inside of the nose caused by an allergen, such as pollen, dust, mould or flakes of skin from certain animals. It typically causes cold-like symptoms, such as persistent sneezing, itchiness, a blocked or runny nose or itchy eyes. These symptoms usually start soon after being exposed to an airborne allergen, which irritates the lining of the nose.

Some people only get allergic rhinitis for a few months at a time because they're sensitive to seasonal allergens, such as tree or grass pollen. Other people get allergic rhinitis all year round. Most people with allergic rhinitis have mild symptoms that can be easily and effectively treated. But for some people symptoms can be severe and persistent, causing sleep problems and interfering with everyday life.

If the exact cause of allergic rhinitis is uncertain, your doctor may refer you to a hospital allergy clinic for allergy testing. A skin prick test is one such test that may help diagnose and treat your symptoms. Skin prick testing is one of the most common allergy tests and is proved to be as accurate as a blood test with immediate results.

Which allergens will you test on me?

Airborne allergens are transported through the air into the nose where they trigger an allergic reaction. We test for an allergic reaction to the most common allergy triggers. They include pollens, mould spores, fur and feathers from pets and house dust mite.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

How do I prepare for the test?

If you are currently taking medicines to relieve symptoms of allergies (antihistamines), you will need to stop these before your test. Histamine is released by the body during an allergic reaction and antihistamine tablets block its release. This would affect the accuracy of results from the test.

If you are currently taking prescribed antihistamines, **please stop taking them 4 days before** your clinic appointment. This includes:

- Piriton (chlorphenamine)
- Zirtek (cetirizine)
- Clarityn (loratidine)
- Neoclaritin (desloratidine)
- Xyzal (levo cetirizine)
- Telfast (fexofenadine)
- Ucerax (hydroxyzine)

Some cough medicines and flu remedies may also contain antihistamines. These should also be stopped 4 days before your clinic appointment. Check with your pharmacist if needed.

If you are taking antidepressants or medicines to slow down the heart (beta-blockers), please tell the nurse at your appointment, before the test starts.

A skin prick test cannot be done on anyone who is pregnant.

What can I expect at my appointment?

The skin prick test will take about 10 minutes to perform, and the results will be visible 15 minutes later.

- The test will be done on both forearms. If you have tattoos on your arms, we may need to do the test on your thighs or back. Please wear clothing that you can remove easily if needed.
- The area of your skin is cleaned with an alcohol wipe.
- A grid is drawn on an area of your skin using a water soluble marker pen. The different zones of the grid will be marked with letters.
- Each bottle of allergen is labelled with a letter. A drop of each allergen is placed in the corresponding marked zone on your skin.
- A tiny sharp sterile needle (lancet) is then used to prick the surface of your skin through each droplet, using light pressure. This allows the allergen to go through your skin where it is introduced to your immune system. A different needle is used for each allergen.
- Once each allergen has been pricked, the droplets are wiped away with some tissue.
- You will then be asked to sit in the waiting area for 15 minutes.
- You will then be called back so we can check the grid on your skin.

When will I know the results?

You will be aware of the result of the test straight away. If you are sensitive to a particular allergen the area will look red, raised and feel itchy. Depending on which of the allergens you react to, you will be given specific advice by the specialist nurse.

The results will be sent to your referring doctor who will arrange a follow-up appointment with you to discuss your results and possible treatment options.

Are there any risks from the test?

Some patients who have asthma may find that they become wheezy or have an asthma attack in the 24 hours after the test. We advise that you bring your inhalers with you to your appointment and keep them near you for 24 hours after the test.

If you prove to be very sensitive to a particular allergen, there is a small risk of having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). If this does happen, it will usually occur whilst you are with us and you will be treated urgently with an EpiPen.

Any rash or itching will normally disappear within a few hours. If this does not settle, seek advice from your GP or attend the Emergency Department.

Contact details

ENT Outpatients Clinic - Level 1, Balmoral Building, Leicester Royal Infirmary

Tel: 0116 258 5170 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

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