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Having a test to check if you are allergic to penicillin (penicillin allergy de-labelling)

Information for Patients

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Introduction

This leaflet explains:

- What penicillin is.
- What a penicillin allergy is.
- Why you have been offered a penicillin allergy de-labelling test.
- What happens during the test.
- What happens after the test.

What is penicillin?

Penicillin is a type of antibiotic. Antibiotics are medicines that help your body fight infections caused by bacteria. Penicillin is very good at treating illnesses such as chest infections, tonsillitis and some skin infections.

Examples of antibiotics with penicillin in are **amoxicillin, pivmecillinam** and **co-amoxiclav**.

What is a penicillin allergy?

An allergy happens when your body's immune system reacts to something that is usually harmless. If someone is allergic to penicillin, their body reacts to the medicine. Many allergic reactions are mild. They can cause an itchy rash that appears a few hours or days after taking penicillin. Very rarely, someone can have a serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This needs emergency treatment. Signs of a serious allergic reaction include:

- trouble breathing,
- swelling of the lips, tongue or throat,
- a rash that spreads very quickly,
- feeling faint or collapsing.

If someone in my family is allergic, will I be too?

No. Penicillin allergy does not usually run in families. Just because a family member is allergic does not mean you will be.

What is the difference between an allergy and a side effect?

A side effect is an unwanted effect that some medicines can cause. Common side effects of penicillin include:

- feeling sick,
- being sick,
- diarrhoea,
- some types of rash

Your doctor or nurse will ask questions to help work out whether you had a true allergy or just a side effect.

Why is penicillin important?

Penicillin often works better than other antibiotics for some infections. If doctors know you are not allergic, they can choose the best medicine for you if you become ill in the future.

How common is penicillin allergy?

About 1 in 10 people think they are allergic to penicillin. When these people are tested, more than 9 out of 10 find out they are not actually allergic. Many people were told they had an allergy when they were younger, but it may have been a side effect or a rash caused by the illness instead.

Why have I been offered a penicillin allergy de-labelling test?

Your medical record says you may be allergic to penicillin. Your healthcare team has checked your medical history and believes it is safe for you to have the test. The test is done in hospital so that trained staff can look after you if you have any reaction.

What are the benefits of having the test?

If the test shows you are not allergic:

- your medical record can be updated,
- doctors can give you penicillin in the future if you need it,
- you will have more choices of antibiotics if you get an infection,

What happens during the test?

Before the test:

- The doctor or nurse will explain everything.
- You can ask questions.
- You will be asked if you agree to the test.

During the test:

- You will take one dose of amoxicillin, which is a type of penicillin.
- Nurses and doctors will watch you carefully for about one hour after the dose has been given.
- They will check how you are feeling and look for any signs of an allergic reaction.

Are there any risks?

Most people do not have any problems. Some people may feel a bit sick or develop an itchy rash later the same day or over the next few days. A serious allergic reaction is rare, but because it is possible, the test is done in hospital where staff can treat it straight away if it happens.

What happens after the test?

If the test shows you are not allergic:

- your medical record will be updated,
- we will tell your GP,
- you can have penicillin in the future if you need it,

If the test shows you are allergic:

- your medical record will show this,
- we will tell your GP,
- you should not take penicillin,
- you may be given an allergy card to carry with you,
- your doctor may refer you to an Allergy specialist,

Do I have to have the test?

No.

Having the test is your choice.

If you decide not to have it, your care in hospital will not change.

You can also change your mind before the test starts.

Will my information be kept private?

Yes. Your healthcare team will record your test result in your medical notes so they know which medicines are safe for you.

Any information used to improve the service will not include details that identify you.

I have a question, who should I ask?

If you have any questions about penicillin allergy or the penicillin allergy de-labelling test please ask your doctor or nurse.

Contact details:

Sometimes, a rash can appear a few days after taking the test dose of penicillin.

If you develop a rash within 7 days after your penicillin allergy challenge test, please contact the hospital team using the details below. You may be referred to an Allergy specialist. Do not take penicillin until you have been assessed further.

Ward telephone number: _____

Consultant's Secretary: _____

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

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