

# Testing your allergic reaction to medication

Adult Allergy Service

Information for Patients

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## Why have I been asked to have a drug reaction test?

You are avoiding a drug/ drugs because of a concern that you are allergic. Avoiding this drug/ these drugs is causing or may cause problems with your treatment now or in the future. Your case has been discussed in a departmental meeting where a decision was made to offer you a drug reaction test. The hope is that this procedure will tell us whether you are allergic or not and if you do seem to be allergic to find a safe alternative.

Patients referred to us have various problems and we test against various drugs. The most common are:

- antibiotics
- local anaesthetic or general anaesthetic
- steroid injections
- painkillers including anti-inflammatory painkillers

## What do I need to do before my appointment?

You will be sent a date to attend. Please confirm that you plan to attend. You will be asked to list the medication you are taking as some medicines can interfere with the testing process and need to be stopped temporarily. You must let us know if there are any new issues with your health in the time leading up to your test as these may also interfere with the test. Any questions please ask.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you need to cancel your appointment so that we can use the slot for another patient.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://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](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## Preparing for your appointment

Please come to the main reception at Glenfield Hospital and ask for the Allergy Day Case clinic. Please wear loose fitting clothes as this makes it easier for the doctors and nurses to do checks and testing (described in more detail below). Please bring material to keep yourself occupied (book, tablet, smartphone). Your appointment may take up to 4 hours so please also bring food and drink as needed.

## What will happen when I attend?

A nurse or doctor will do checks (blood pressure, oxygen level, heart rate and lung strength) and give you a name badge. The doctor will explain the procedure in detail and answer any questions before asking you to give consent if you are happy with the information you have been given.

The doctor will listen to your heart and lungs and look at your skin and mouth to make sure you are well enough to have the test.

Not all drug reaction tests are the same. You may have some or all of the following tests:

- **Skin prick test:**

Skin prick testing is one of the most common allergy tests. It involves putting a drop of liquid onto your forearm that contains a substance you may be allergic to. The skin under the drop is then gently pricked. If you're allergic to the substance an itchy, red bump will appear within 15 minutes.

- **Intradermal (under the skin) test:**

This test consists of injecting a small amount of liquid drug under the skin with a syringe and a needle. The test is read after 20 minutes to assess the resulting swelling and redness. This test will sting rather like an insect bite and several tests may be needed.

- **Delayed Intradermal test:**

Sometimes we ask you to take a photo of the test site as well as provide you with a copy of our records so that you can let us know if you develop an itchy bump or skin rash at the site of the tests in the week following your appointment.

- **Graded oral / ingestion test:**

In many cases this is the last step of a drug reaction test. It often takes place on a separate day to skin prick and intradermal tests

During the test, you are given a drug by mouth in slowly increasing amounts to see if it is safe under close supervision.

This step is the most accurate way of testing for drug allergy or tolerance. It does carry a risk of a more severe allergic reaction and for this reason a line/cannula will be inserted into your hand or arm before this is done. This is for use in case you have an allergic reaction that needs treatment through a line/cannula.

The doctor will have explained the risks and benefits of this part of the test during the consent process. Drug reaction testing is always carried out in a clinic where a severe allergic reaction can be treated if it does develop.

- **Deep subcutaneous injection:**

This test is the last part of a local anaesthetic drug test. A local anaesthetic is injected into the upper arm. This does not hurt. It does carry a risk of more severe allergic reaction and for this reason a line/ cannula will be inserted into your hand or arm before this is done. This is for use in case you have an allergic reaction that needs treatment through a line/ cannula. The doctor will have explained the risks and benefits of this part of the test during the consent process. Drug reaction testing is always carried out in a clinic where a severe allergic reaction can be treated if it does develop.

## **What happens at the end of my tests?**

The result of the test will be explained. In some cases the result will be written on a temporary note to allow immediate care if needed. More commonly, you will be sent a letter about the test results with practical advice for your future caregivers.

## **What are the limitations of testing?**

Sometimes and for various reasons, these tests cannot give clear guidance for future treatment. This may be because skin prick or intradermal testing results are difficult to interpret if, for example your skin is too sensitive. It may also be the case if you develop symptoms that are not consistent with allergy but result in the test being abandoned.

Drug reaction testing is not a perfect test but if offered it will be because your doctors feel it can help with understanding your health. Even an inconclusive drug reaction test can give your caregivers more information about your story of drug reactions.

## **Contact details**

Please contact the Adult Allergy Service at Glenfield Hospital should you have any questions about your tests:

Secretary for consultants: 0116 258 3118

Allergy Nurse Specialist: 0116 258 3557

