

Information sheet for patients and parents

Allergy Testing Children's out-patients, St Luke's Hospital, Bradford

A very warm welcome to our children's allergy testing service. In the UK, up to 50% of children are diagnosed with an allergy and rates continue to rise. Allergy testing, also known as skin prick testing, has become an effective method for identifying specific allergies due to its simplicity, rapid feedback and diagnosis. This leaflet explains what the test involves and what will happen when you bring your child to clinic.

Why does my child need a skin prick test?

Your doctor may request a skin prick test if they suspect that your child has an allergy. An allergy occurs when the body reacts to an allergen causing mild to extreme symptoms such as rash, swelling, itching and difficulty breathing. An allergen is the substance that causes the allergic reaction and may be harmless to others. Identifying specific allergies helps in the treatment and prevention of reactions.

What are the alternatives?

Blood testing for allergies is available, but this is more invasive.

What allergies can we test for?

This needs to be discussed with your doctor. You may already have an idea of which product is causing a reaction. We can test for a wide range of allergies. For example, if your child is allergic to nuts then we may test against a variety of nuts to see if we can establish which particular nut is causing the problem. Other common tests are for cow's milk, eggs, fruits, fish, vegetables, grains and pollens, but many more tests are available.

What will happen?

You will receive an appointment for your child to attend the Children's out-patients department at St Luke's Hospital, Bradford. Allergy testing is carried out by registered nurses who are specifically trained in allergy testing. You will be in the department for approximately one hour.

Please note: The skin prick test can be affected if your child takes antihistamines during the five days before the test. Some cough mixtures contain antihistamines so please check. If your child does need to take antihistamine or has been prescribed them for another condition then it is very important that they continue to take them. You will just need to rearrange the skin prick test appointment to a later date. We also suggest rearranging your child's appointment if they have a cold, fever or worsening allergy or asthma symptoms on the day of the test.

What the test involves

The test involves allergens being introduced to the skin to see if any reaction occurs. A drop of allergen is placed onto the skin on the inner forearm and the skin is then gently pricked. Several allergens may be tested at the same time and the arm is marked with tape to identify where each allergen has been placed. Your child needs to be kept as still as possible whilst the procedure is carried out. The solution needs to stay in place for 15 minutes and your child must avoid tampering with the area or scratching it. The nurse will then measure the reaction to see if the allergen has had a positive response. If there is an allergic reaction, then the test will produce a small, localised response such as a wheal (bump) on the skin, redness and inflammation.

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Does the skin prick testing hurt?

Skin tests tend to be uncomfortable rather than painful and are a very quick procedure to carry out. It may feel itchy more than anything else. Most children and infants cope with it very well. If your child has had a blood test previously, then please reassure them that this is not the same and will certainly be less painful.

Are there any risks or side effects?

- Common side-effects include red and itchy skin at the test site. Any redness or swelling at the site normally resolves within a couple of hours. You may give your child some antihistamine if required once the test has been completed and documented.
- As only a very small amount of solution is put on the skin anaphylactic responses are extremely unlikely. An anaphylactic response usually develops suddenly and gets worse very quickly and can be potentially life-threatening. If your child does become unwell after leaving the clinic, then please contact your local Accident & Emergency department immediately. It is also important that you contact us to make us aware of this incident.
- We do ask that you stay in the department for 30 minutes post procedure so that we can observe for any adverse reactions.

When will I get the results?

The nurse may be able to indicate which allergens have stimulated a reaction at the time of your appointment, but in the meantime please continue to avoid any foods that you suspect your child may be allergic to until you have been reviewed by your paediatrician and a proper assessment has been made. Your GP will then be made aware of the results.

Useful Contact Details

Please contact Children's out patients on 01274-365085 if you need to reschedule your child's appointment - or if you have any queries.

We use the BT Text Relay service for patients who are deaf or have hearing difficulties. To contact us please phone 18001 01274-274274.

Address: Children's out-patients, Horton Wing, Area 4, St Luke's Hospital, Little Horton Lane, Bradford, BD5 0NA.

Allergy UK: We also recommend that you visit the Allergy UK website which has some excellent information and updates for those with allergies. In particular, there is a useful 'child allergy' section to refer to. www.allergyuk.org

Epipen UK: If your child has been prescribed an Epipen then we also recommend that you visit the Epipen UK website for further information, including a training video. They also offer an alert service for when your Epipen is about to expire.

We offer Epipen training in clinic along with refresher sessions. We also have Epipen training packs available which contain a trainer pen for practise at home. We recommend that you practise regularly. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance. www.epipen.co.uk

Further information

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff.

Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke in any of the hospital buildings or grounds, with the exception of the smoking shelters which are provided for visitors and patients only.

We hope that this leaflet has been useful to you, but please let us know if you have any further suggestions. We are always keen to improve our service.