

Penicillin Allergy Test

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet tells you:

- what penicillin is;
- what an allergy to penicillin is; and
- how to find out if you are allergic to penicillin.

What is penicillin?

Penicillin is a type of antibiotic. It works very well to treat common bacterial infections like pneumonia, tonsillitis and skin infections.

What is an allergy to penicillin?

An allergy is a reaction of your body's immune system. The immune system can react to penicillin or to another penicillin-type of antibiotic. For most people, the allergic reaction is a mild skin reaction or rash that develops slowly several hours or days after taking penicillin.

Sometimes a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis can happen. This is very rare but it can be life-threatening. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include a rash that spreads fast, swelling of the mouth, throat or tongue, and breathing difficulties. These symptoms will often happen less than one hour after taking penicillin, and always within two hours of taking penicillin.

Can a family member be allergic to penicillin?

Penicillin allergy does not run in families, so if you have a relative who is allergic to it, there is no reason to think that you will also be allergic to it.

What is the difference between an allergy and side effects?

Most reactions to penicillin are side effects, not allergies. Side effects are mostly mild and brief unpleasant effects of treatment. The most common side effects from penicillin include: skin rashes, being sick, feeling sick, or having diarrhoea. Unlike allergies, having side effects to penicillin should not necessarily stop you from taking penicillin again. Medication can be given to help you manage side effects if needed, to make sure you can receive penicillin in the future.

Why is penicillin important?

Penicillin can work better than other types of antibiotic to treat bacterial infections. Knowing if you are allergic to penicillin is important, to make sure that you are given the best antibiotic for you.

How common is allergy to penicillin?

Around 1 out of 10 people report having an allergy to penicillin. However, evidence suggests that more than 9 out of 10 people who report an allergy to penicillin might **not** be allergic to it; they might just have had side effects from taking penicillin.

Why do we need to test people for an allergy to penicillin?

About 9 out of 10 people who have a record of an allergy to penicillin are found to not have a real allergy to it when tested. Although you may have experienced side effects after taking penicillin, most of these disappear over time. This means that most people can safely take penicillin, giving them more options for antibiotics to treat bacterial infections.

Why am I being offered a test for an allergy to penicillin?

You are being offered this test because your health record states that you have an allergy to penicillin, and the healthcare team has assessed that it is safe to do the test. Doing the test when you are in hospital means that you can be safely monitored and treated if needed while having the test done.

What are the benefits of testing?

If you have the test and the results show that you are not allergic to penicillin, then we will update your medical record to correct your allergy status, and you will be able to take penicillin antibiotics in the future. This will give you more options for treating a range of common bacterial infections, such as skin or chest infections, or if you need to take antibiotics before an operation.

How is the test done?

We will ask you to sign a consent form before the test, to confirm that you understand what the test involves, and any potential risks and side effects. You will be able to ask the healthcare team any questions you might have. The test involves you taking a single capsule of amoxicillin, a penicillin antibiotic. We will carefully monitor you for any allergic reactions and other side effects.

What are the possible risks and side effects?

Side effects are usually mild and include feeling sick. There is a small risk that you might experience an allergic reaction, and this is why we do the test in a hospital. About 1 in 20 people will have an itchy rash over several hours or days. A more severe reaction, including anaphylaxis, might occur but it is very rare. We would only offer this test to people we consider to have a very low risk of an allergic reaction. If you do have an allergic reaction, we will give you immediate treatment with anti-allergy medicines to stop it.

What happens after the test?

The healthcare team will explain the result of the test to you. You will also be provided with a copy of the test results. If the test shows you do not have an allergic reaction to penicillin, you will then be able to take penicillin antibiotics if you need them. We will update your medical record and write to your GP to tell them the results of the test.

If the test confirms that you are allergic to penicillin, your medical record will continue to state this, and you should not take penicillin antibiotics in the future. We will also tell your GP about your test result. You will be given an allergy card, keep your card with you at all times.

All Wales guidance for penicillin allergy de-labelling in adults in secondary care

If you have some symptoms after the test and it is unclear if you have had an allergic reaction, the team looking after you can refer you to a specialist for further assessment.

Do I need to do the test if it is recommended?

Taking this test is voluntary. If you choose not to have the test, there will be no change to the treatment you receive while in hospital. You can change your mind about having the test at any time.

What will you do with the information about the results of my test?

Many studies have shown testing for allergy to penicillin in this way is a safe way to remove labels of penicillin allergy from patient records. However, as this is a new service it is important that we collect information about the results of the test. This will let the healthcare team monitor the effectiveness of the test process. All your personal details, or information that could identify you, will be removed from the results that they see.

**If you develop a rash or any other worrying reaction after discharge
from hospital please contact**

(INSERT APPROPRIATE LOCAL CONTACT)