

# Allergy tests: Skin prick tests, blood tests and challenges

Information for parents and carers



Leeds children's  
hospital

caring about children



## There are two types of allergy tests; skin prick tests and blood tests.

Your consultant or nurse specialist will decide which tests are necessary by looking at your child's allergy history.

There are other tests that can tell us about your child's allergy and asthma.

### Skin prick testing

Skin prick testing is a safe and simple procedure and can help to tell us if your child is at risk of an immediate allergy.

**It is important to stop all antihistamines before the skin prick test as they will interfere with the results. Please stop all medicines containing antihistamine four days before your allergy clinic appointment.**

However, if your child can't stop their antihistamines, or if you are in doubt about if the medicine your child is taking contains antihistamine, phone the Nurse Specialist on **(0113) 392 0681** a week before the appointment for advice.

Skin prick tests are performed by the consultant, the children's nurse specialists or by specially trained children's nurses.

Skin prick tests are usually done on the inside of the arm between the elbow and the wrist. Sometimes the upper back may be used in small children.

An allergen is the name given to the substance (e.g. a food or pollen) that can cause an allergic reaction. A ballpoint pen will be used to indicate what allergens are being tested, and a

small droplet of each allergen solution will be placed next to the marking.

If a fruit or vegetable (eg strawberry, kiwi fruit, tomato) or prawn/shrimp is suspected to be causing allergic reactions, please bring a small fresh uncooked piece of the food to be used for skin prick testing, as this is more accurate than using an allergen solution.

After all the drops are on the arm, a small metal stick is used to gently press against the skin through the drop.

The skin prick tests might feel like a small scratch or a sting, but it is not usually painful. Itching on the arm is common, but usually stops after 20-30 minutes.

When the test has been completed, the solutions are wiped from the skin. There is a 10-15 minute wait before the results can be read.

If the test is positive, a white itchy spot or wheal (a raised bump) will appear.

The size of the wheal is measured with a special ruler and recorded, which the doctor or specialist nurse will interpret.

The size of the wheal does not indicate how severe an allergic reaction may be. The skin prick test can help identify which allergens may be causing you or your child's symptoms.

Skin prick testing is a very safe procedure, and is extremely unlikely to cause anyone to have an allergic reaction. However oral antihistamine is available, if needed.

After the skin prick test, the doctor or nurse will give you advice and information based on you or your child's test results.

## Specific IgE blood tests

Sometimes, it is not possible to do skin prick tests if, for example, antihistamines were taken within three days before the skin prick test or if eczema on the arm makes it too difficult to do skin tests.

In these cases, a blood test can provide similar information because it is possible to detect an allergy antibody to a food or pollen in the blood. This allergy antibody is referred to as the specific IgE.

If you or your child wishes, we can use an anaesthetic cream which will numb the skin for temporarily and help to reduce the discomfort of the blood test. Very occasionally a bruise may appear in the area where the blood has been taken from.

It usually takes approximately 2 weeks to have the results available from the blood tests.

## Food/medicine challenges

Sometimes, further tests are needed to establish whether someone is allergic to a particular food or medicine, or if they have grown out of their allergy. It is in these cases that a food or medicine challenge can be very useful.

Challenges are usually done in hospital and involve eating increasing quantities of the food or having a dose of medicine while being closely monitored for any sign of allergic reactions.

The challenge typically begins with very small amount of the food or medicine and is slowly increased, as tolerated. If an allergic reaction occurs, it is treated immediately.

If a reaction does not occur, then the food or medicine is usually considered safe to eat or use.

Food or medication challenges are only offered if it is considered safe to do so, and will be of benefit for the child/young person and their family.

Food or medication challenges will usually occur on a separate day from the allergy clinic appointment.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:**

**Children's Allergy Nurses**

Telephone: **(0113) 392 0681**

Email: **[leedsth-tr.allergy@nhs.net](mailto:leedsth-tr.allergy@nhs.net)**

Webpage:

**[www.leedsth.nhs.uk/a-z-of-services/childrens-allergy-service/](http://www.leedsth.nhs.uk/a-z-of-services/childrens-allergy-service/)**

**Further Information:**

**Anaphylaxis Campaign – [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk)**

**Allergy UK – [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)**





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