

Skin prick allergy testing for airborne allergens

What is a skin prick test?

A skin prick test is a quick and usually painless procedure that can help to establish whether you/your child have any particular allergies.

From the information you give to the doctor, a decision will be made as to which allergies need to be tested on you/your child. The results of the test will be available within 10 minutes of completing the test. The main categories for skin testing are:

1. House dust mite.
2. Animals.
3. Pollens.
4. Moulds.

The forearm is usually used for skin testing but the back may be an alternative for babies or children with bad eczema.

Please avoid using hand lotions on your forearms before the test.

A pen/tape is used to mark the skin and a small droplet of each allergen solution, including a positive and negative control, placed next to it. A small lancet is used to prick the surface of the skin (very slightly). This should cause no discomfort or pain.

The positive droplet is histamine, a substance the body releases in response to the allergen. This will produce a red wheal very similar to a nettle sting and will cause the skin to itch. The negative droplet is saline (salt water) and does not usually react on the skin.

When the test has been completed, the solutions are wiped from the skin. You will be asked to wait 10 minutes for the results.

A positive reaction will produce a red patch of skin with a raised wheal in the middle, which will slowly expand to reach its maximum size in 10 minutes. The size of the wheal varies in diameter and is measured. The wheal will usually disappear approximately one hour after the skin test.

After the skin test, the Healthcare Practitioner will give you advice on avoidance and information on the positive reactions.

Why would I need this procedure?

This procedure may be requested if you have a runny/blocked/itchy nose or a cough.

What are the symptoms that have led to me having this procedure?

Hay fever type symptoms (itchy nose/eyes, sneezing), blocked nose or chronic cough.

What are the alternatives?

Have a blood test IgE. The results of the blood test will take a few weeks. Not having the test done may be an option if you choose to use over-the-counter treatment (i.e antihistamines, nasal steroid spray) with satisfactory effect.

What are the potential risks and side effects?

Most patients tolerate the procedure very well. The main side effect is the redness of the forearm and slight skin irritation. A severe allergic (anaphylactic) reaction is very rare.

The risks associated with the skin prick test will be discussed with you by your Healthcare Practitioner prior to asking you to sign a consent form.

What are the expected benefits of treatment?

Diagnosis of allergy and avoidance advice.

What should I do before I come into hospital?

It is important to **stop all** antihistamines (i.e cetirizine or Zirtek, loratadine) **a week before** the test. **Some cough medicines and antidepressants or sleeping tablets** may also interfere with skin reactivity as well as long term/high dose steroids (e.g. prednisolone). However, these medicines should not be stopped without discussion with your doctor/nurse. Your pharmacist will be able to advise whether a medication contains antihistamine or steroids.

Other drugs may also affect skin reactivity which is why we use positive and negative control tests. Nasal steroid sprays or inhaled steroids for asthma do not need to be stopped

The procedure will take place in a clinic room in an Outpatients Department.

Will I have an anaesthetic?

No anaesthetic is required.

How will I feel afterwards?

You can resume your daily activities immediately.

How long will I be in hospital?

The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes.

Consent

Please be aware we take written consent on the appointment date of the skin prick allergy test, this must be from a parent or legal guardian for children. Although you consent for this treatment, you may at any time after that withdraw such consent. Please discuss this with your medical team.

Sources of information

Eastbourne DGH – ENT Outpatients Department: 0300 131 4500 ext 735596

Conquest Hospital – ENT Outpatients Department: 0300 131 4500 ext 773227

Health A to Z NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergic-rhinitis/>

ENT UK – Patient information <https://www.entuk.org/>

The British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology <https://www.bsaci.org/>

Allergy UK <https://www.allergyuk.org/>

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

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