

Suspected drug allergy investigations

This leaflet explains what to expect when your child has an investigation of their suspected drug allergy at the children's allergy service at St Thomas' Hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

Why has my child been referred?

Your child has been referred to our service because of a previous adverse (unwanted) reaction. These symptoms resulted in a healthcare professional becoming concerned that they may have been caused by a drug allergy. Currently your child is avoiding, or has not had a need for, the medicine suspected of causing the adverse reaction.

Adverse reactions to medicines are not uncommon, but only very few occur due to allergy. For example, if a child develops a rash while taking antibiotics to treat an infection, it is difficult to know if the rash was caused by the infection or the medication (or both). This is why your GP will usually be careful and state your child is allergic to that particular drug, rather than risk them having an allergic reaction. It is important to investigate a **suspected** drug allergy to achieve an accurate diagnosis, in case your child ever needs that particular drug again.

How is a suspected drug allergy investigated?

A diagnosis of drug allergy is achieved by first talking to you and your child about what happened when the suspected medication was given (clinical history). If the clinical history strongly suggests the reaction was caused by the medication, we will not proceed any further. For most children their clinical history is not suggestive of an allergic reaction.

The next step is to give your child incremental doses of the medication, by mouth, under supervision. This is known as a drug provocation test or challenge. Occasionally we will undertake other tests, such as:

- skin prick tests – where a small amount of the medicine is placed on your child's skin and the skin is 'pricked' through the medicine (see our leaflet, **Skin prick testing**, for more information)
- intra-dermal tests – where a small amount of the suspected drug is injected into the top layer of the skin, to assess for a reaction
- blood tests.

The test we carry out will vary, depending on the drug in question, and the symptoms associated with your child's reaction. The testing will be carried out by specially trained staff, in an area which is able to recognise and treat an allergic reaction, should one occur.

Depending on your child's reaction, and the type of drug they were given, they may be referred to either the rapid access drug allergy service or the consultant outpatient drug allergy service.

Rapid access drug allergy service

We will aim to see your child within six weeks of referral to this clinic. Alternatively, we will speak to you as part of our telephone drug allergy clinic. Having discussed the details of your child's reaction on the phone, we will decide what sort of tests are required for your child and plan a hospital appointment, if necessary.

At your child's appointment you will be seen by either the consultant nurse or clinical nurse specialist, whose area of expertise includes drug allergy investigations. They will ask you about your child's suspected allergic reaction, and assess your child to make sure they are well on the day of their appointment. This includes listening to their chest with a stethoscope, taking their temperature, pulse, blood pressure and respiratory (breathing) rate.

If the nurse feels it is appropriate, they will carry out a drug provocation test. Your child will be given the drug suspected of causing their allergic reaction by mouth in one full dose or a few incremental doses administered every 30 minutes. They will then be observed for one hour to check for any signs of an allergic reaction. If your child tolerates the medicine then you will be issued with a supply of the medicine to take at home. Your child will continue to take this for three or five days to make sure they can tolerate the medicine without any further reaction, such as a rash.

If your child has an allergic reaction, this will be treated immediately and they may need to stay in hospital for a longer period of observation. A doctor is always available should they be needed.

If your child is **currently taking any medicines**, please call the allergy nurses, t: 020 7188 3300 **at least two weeks before** their appointment with the drug allergy service.

Some medicines can affect the results of the tests we do and may need to be stopped before the tests. Your child must also be completely well on the day of the appointment. If they are unwell we may not be able to do the testing.

Consultant outpatient drug allergy service

Your child may not be suitable for investigation in our rapid access service.

If this is the case, they will be referred to our outpatient drug allergy service, where they will first be seen in the outpatient clinic or assessed as part of the telephone drug allergy clinic and, if appropriate, referred on to the day case unit for further testing.

This testing may include skin prick, intra-dermal, or drug provocation tests. The clinician who you see in the outpatient clinic will discuss this with you.

Are there any risks associated with drug allergy investigations?

There is a risk that your child will have an allergic reaction to the medicine they are being tested to. This is why the tests are performed in a hospital setting. Your child will be closely observed by an allergy nurse specialist who will monitor them for any signs of allergic reaction, such as an itchy rash or breathing difficulties. A doctor will always be available if needed.

If your child does have an allergic reaction, a medicine will be given to relieve the symptoms and to stop the reaction from getting worse – this may be an antihistamine such as chlorphenamine (Piriton®) or in a severe reaction, adrenaline (Epipen® or Jext®).

What are the alternatives to my child having a drug allergy tests?

You may choose for your child to not have the suspected drug allergy investigated. The staff in the drug allergy service will discuss what this may mean for your child. Your child should then continue to avoid the medicine suspected of causing a reaction, in case they are allergic to that it. You should make sure that all clinicians caring for your child are aware that your child might be allergic to that medicine and that a safe, alternative medication should be used.

What happens after the investigation?

What happens next depends on whether your child receives a positive or negative test result.

Positive test results

This is when your child reacts to the medicine they are being tested to. A positive reaction means your child **is** allergic and needs to avoid that medicine. The doctors and nurses will treat the reaction as needed, and your child will be monitored two to four hours after their reaction. Sometimes, children may need to be observed for a longer period and may need to stay in hospital overnight. If your child does stay overnight, you will be able to stay with them.

You will need to tell all clinicians who are involved in caring for your child that they are allergic to that medicine, so that it is not used and an alternative must be given instead. This diagnosis should be recorded on all health records including your child's red book (personal child health record), GP notes and hospital notes. It may also be necessary to record the allergy on a medical identification bracelet.

Negative test results

This is when no reaction occurs to any of the medicine, including after the observation period. If the medicine is an antibiotic, your child will be given a short course of the medicine to take at home for three days. This is to make sure there is no delayed reaction.

Will my child have a follow-up appointment?

We will talk with you about this during your visit. Depending upon the reaction and if there are any more medicines suspected of causing an allergic reaction, another appointment may be required. We will send you and your child's GP a letter with information about your test results.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the procedure, please contact one of the children's allergy nurses, **t:** 020 7188 3300, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or book a nurse telephone call back, **w:** www.zesty.co.uk/practices/childrens-allergy-nurse-helpline.

To book a drug provocation test for your child, go to **w:** www.zesty.co.uk/practices/food-challenge

If you would like to cancel or change your child's appointment, speak to the day case coordinator, **t:** 020 7188 6390, **w:** www.zesty.co.uk/practices/food-challenge

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

t: 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm **e:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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