

## Low Risk Penicillin Allergies

*This document should not replace the advice of your relevant healthcare professional.*

Many people report allergic reactions to antibiotics, especially to penicillin. Many penicillin allergies disappear after a few years. You may be able to take a simple test to see if you still have a penicillin allergy.

### What is a penicillin allergy?

A penicillin allergy is an unwanted reaction to penicillin. It can be serious (life-threatening) or mild.

Signs of a serious penicillin allergy include:

- anaphylaxis (a serious and life-threatening allergic reaction that occurs after being exposed to a medicine, food or insect bite that you are allergic to). Signs or symptoms of anaphylaxis include:
  - very low blood pressure
  - weak and/or rapid pulse or heartbeat
  - rash with other symptoms, developing quickly after exposure to the substance
  - swollen lips or tongue

If you experience any signs or symptoms of anaphylaxis, you should immediately call 000 for urgent medical assistance.

- rash, accompanied by becoming very unwell

### What is a low risk penicillin allergy?

A low risk penicillin allergy causes mild symptoms and is unlikely to occur again. You may have a low risk penicillin allergy if you have:

- had rash(es) during or soon after finishing a course of penicillin prescribed in childhood or a long time ago
- rashes on small parts of your body during or soon after a course of penicillin
- had an unexplained reaction to penicillin more than 10 years ago

90% (9 out of 10) of these reactions to penicillin are lost over time and may not have been caused by penicillin.

If you think you have a low risk allergy to a penicillin antibiotic, you will need to take a test to be certain.

### How to know if you have a low risk penicillin allergy

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will assess you to find out if you have either a low risk or a high risk penicillin allergy. You will be asked questions and it is important you give as much information as possible. If your doctor thinks you have a low risk penicillin allergy, they will discuss the option to have an 'Oral Penicillin Challenge Test'. This test is simple and very low risk.

### What is the oral penicillin challenge test?

For this test, you will be asked to swallow one capsule (a small amount) of the penicillin. A nurse will watch you closely for two hours to see if you have an immediate allergic reaction. If there is no reaction during this time, then you do not have an immediate allergy to penicillin. A mild rash may appear a few days after the

test, but this is very rare. We will give you a letter to take home with a phone number to call if you notice anything unusual you think might be related to the test.

## **Benefits for taking the oral penicillin challenge test**

By doing the test, you will find out if you still have a penicillin allergy.

If your test shows you no longer have a penicillin allergy, then your doctor has more antibiotics to choose from. This may mean that you get a more effective and safer antibiotic for an infection.

## **Is the oral penicillin challenge test safe?**

Yes, the test is very low risk. This test has been taken by thousands of people across the world. After the test, many people have discovered that they are able to safely take penicillin.

During the test, you will be watched closely by your nurse or doctor. If you develop any signs of an allergic reaction, for example; a rash, difficulty breathing, swelling, or a change in your blood pressure or pulse, your nurse or doctor will treat you immediately.

## **What happens after you have had the test?**

You and your doctor(s) will be notified of the test results.

You will each receive a letter explaining:

- the name of the test and your results
- the name of the antibiotics that are safest for you to take.

All results will be placed in your medical history.

**Ensure all your healthcare providers are aware of your antibiotic allergies.**

**You can document your allergy information in your My Health Record.**

**It is important to carry any Allergy Alert Cards with you at all times.**



## **Contact information:**

Organisation

Phone number

**In the event of an emergency, please dial 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.**