

## Skin Test for Penicillin Allergy

### *What to expect*

*This handout explains a skin test for penicillin allergy.*

### **What is an allergy?**

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to a substance (*allergen*). An allergic reaction occurs when the immune system produces antibodies to fight the allergen. This causes your body to release *histamine* and other chemicals that cause allergy symptoms.

### **Why do I need a skin test?**

A skin test will help us find out if you have antibodies in your body that are causing your allergy symptoms.

### **How is a skin test done?**

The test uses a small amount of the allergen we think may be causing your allergy symptoms. There are 2 ways to do this test:

- In the *prick test*, we will place a small drop of the allergen on your skin. A needle is then used to prick your skin in that spot.
- In the *intra-dermal test*, we will use a small syringe needle to inject a little of the allergen into the top (superficial) layers of your skin.

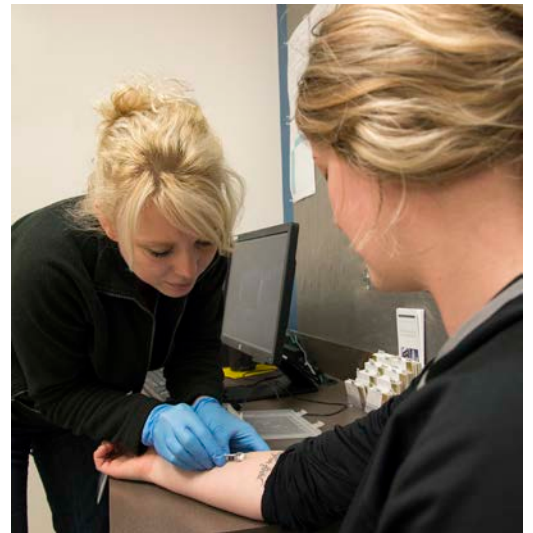
We will measure the results 15 to 20 minutes after we apply the allergen to your skin.

### **What can I expect?**

The test will usually be done on your arm, but it can also be done on skin on other areas of the body. We will test your skin for reactions to:

- Penicillin *reagents* (PRE-PEN and Penicillin G)
- Histamine (diluted)

If you are sensitive to one of these allergens, a red, raised,



*A skin test for allergies is usually done on the arm.*

itchy *wheal* (hives) will appear on your skin within 10 to 20 minutes. Most times, this reaction slowly fades away over the next 30 to 60 minutes.

Sometimes, local swelling at a test site will begin 4 to 8 hours after the skin tests. This is called a *delayed reaction*. This reaction is not serious. It should go away over the next 1 or 2 days.

If you have any swelling after your skin test, call your doctor or nurse to report it.

## How do I prepare for the test?

Before we start your skin tests, please tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- Have started any new medicines since your last visit
- Are pregnant
- Have a fever or are wheezing today, or if you have had any *acute* (short-term) illness in the past 24 hours

## What will the test results show?

If you get a *wheal* (hives) and redness in the area where we place the allergen, you may be having a *positive reaction*. We will need to check the size of the wheal to be sure.

This test result means you may have antibodies in your body that react to penicillin. If this is true, you should not receive penicillin in the future.

## What risks are involved in this skin test?

This skin test uses substances that you may be allergic to. Because of this, there is a small risk that you will have more severe reactions.

**Tell the nurse right away if you have any of these symptoms during or after your test:**

- Overall itching
- Swelling
- Throat tightness
- Cough
- Problems breathing

**These reactions could become life-threatening if they are not treated.** If we know you are having these symptoms, we will take steps to treat them.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

#### Pharmacy at UWMC - Northwest:

Weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., call 206.368.1696.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.364.0500 and ask to talk with the pharmacist.