

Paediatric allergy

Drug challenge - all you need to know

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

Drug challenges are tests that are performed in hospital to see if your child is allergic to or able to take a particular medicine. This leaflet explains what to expect when your child has a drug challenge. Please contact the paediatric allergy team if you have any questions or concerns using the details on page 3.

If you decide to go ahead with the drug challenge you must book it by calling 020 3311 6611.

What is a drug challenge?

A drug challenge tests whether or not your child is allergic to a particular drug (medicine). It is therefore carried out under close medical supervision. There are different ways to do this test, but we usually start by giving your child a very low dose of the medicine being tested, and then another dose(s) 30 minutes later. A drug challenge usually lasts around four to six hours.

What are the benefits of having a drug challenge?

A drug challenge will confirm whether your child is allergic to a particular drug. If your child does not experience any allergic symptoms, then we can be confident that they do not have an allergy to that medicine and they can take it in the future, if needed.

What are the possible risks of having a drug challenge?

Your child may have an allergic reaction to the drug being tested. This is why the test is done in hospital and not at home. We will carefully monitor your child during the test and a doctor will always be available if needed. If your child experiences an allergic reaction, we will stop the test immediately. Medicine(s) will be given to relieve any symptoms and to stop the reaction from getting worse – this may be an antihistamine such as cetirizine or, in the case of a more severe reaction, adrenaline (Epipen®, Jext® or Emerade®).

Why has my child been offered a drug challenge?

This is usually because your child is likely to be able to take the drug and they may need that drug in the future. Please take your time to decide whether you would like your child to have the drug challenge. If you feel your child might not want to try the drug on the challenge day, please try and talk to them before coming into hospital.

What are the alternatives to my child having a drug challenge?

You may choose for your child not to have a drug challenge and just continue to avoid the drug they may be allergic to. Please understand that a drug challenge is the only safe and sure way to find out whether they have a drug allergy or not.

What should I do to prepare my child for the drug challenge?

Preparing your child for their hospital visit will help them understand what is happening and can improve their willingness to cooperate on the day. Talking to them beforehand will give them time to ask any questions they may have. Always give truthful, factual information. You may wish to bring some familiar toys or books with you to help your child feel at ease. Your child can eat a light snack and drink during the challenge and also have lunch, usually once the challenge is completed. Please bring a packed lunch. We will provide the drug for your child's challenge. You will need to stay with your child at all times during the challenge, so you may want to bring some food for yourself too.

Your child must be well with no cough, cold or recent infections for at least two weeks before the challenge. If they have asthma or eczema this must be well controlled and stable.

If your child is taking medications, please follow these instructions:

Antihistamines: Your child may be taking a regular antihistamine such as chlorpheniramine, cetirizine or loratadine (Piriton®, Zirtek® or Clarityn®). These will need to be stopped five days before the challenge. Some cough medicines will also contain antihistamine (e.g. Tixylix®).

Asthma medication: Your child should continue to take their regular preventative asthma inhalers (usually brown, orange or purple). Blue inhalers (Ventolin® or Bricanyl®); if your child is wheezy, coughing or has needed their blue inhaler more often than usual in the two weeks before the challenge, please contact the allergy team on **020 3312 6091** before the challenge day to discuss this further.

Please bring your child's allergy medications with you on the challenge day, including the adrenaline auto-injector(s), if they have any.

Please **complete the checklist** at the end of this leaflet to make sure your child can have the test.

What will happen on the challenge day?

On arrival we will explain the challenge in detail and answer any questions you or your child may have. We will ask you to sign a consent form on behalf of your child (so the person attending the appointment with your child must be the parent or legal guardian). The nurse will then make sure your child is fit and well to have the challenge and take their temperature, blood pressure and oxygen levels. These will be repeated during the test. Your child will usually receive two increasing doses of the medicine to be tested, with 30 minutes in between doses. We will then observe your child for two to four hours before discharge. We will treat any reaction as needed. In the unlikely event of a serious reaction, your child may need to stay in hospital overnight.

What will happen after the challenge day?

For some medicines such as antibiotics, after a negative (successful) challenge, we will give you a short course of the medicine to give your child at home, so we can be sure that they are not allergic to a course of the medicine. We will explain this more on the day. If your child is allergic to the medicine, then they will need to avoid the medicine in the future and we will provide a letter with further information for you and your child's GP. We will arrange appropriate follow-up in the allergy clinic, if needed.

Contact details

If you are concerned or have any questions before the challenge, or have difficulties reading English, please call the allergy team on 020 3312 6091. It will ask you to leave a voice message and the allergy nurses will get back to you within two to three working days. Please note that this number is not for urgent healthcare queries. For urgent queries, contact 999 (for emergencies), 111 (for non-emergencies) or your GP, as appropriate. Please see the table below for other useful contact numbers.

How do I book the drug challenge if I wish to go ahead?

If you and your child are happy to go ahead, please phone the booking team on 020 3311 6611 within 28 days of your last visit. You will need to say which drug they will try in hospital. If you do not phone to book the challenge, you will get a reminder letter by post. If you do not phone to book within 42 days of your visit, you will not be able to rebook the challenge.

If you need to cancel a challenge that has been booked, please contact **020 3311 6611**. If you do not attend your appointment, please contact the number above as soon as possible. Otherwise, you will not be able to rebook the challenge.

Pre-challenge checklist

Please complete this checklist the day before the challenge and bring it with you on the day.

Pre-challenge checklist	Yes	No
My child* and I understand why the test has been advised		
My child* and I understand the benefits and risks of the test		
My child* and I are happy to go ahead with the test		
My child has not taken any antihistamines for five days before the challenge		
My child has not been unwell in the two weeks before the challenge (e.g. with fever, a cold, a sore throat, tummy bug or a flare of their asthma, hay fever or eczema)		
I'll bring my child's allergy medications on the day		

*(if old enough)

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department
Fourth floor
Salton House
St Mary's Hospital
Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: **imperial.patient.information@nhs.net**

Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM