

# Penicillin Allergy Facts

10% of all US patients report a penicillin allergy **BUT** many are not truly allergic. In fact, **Nine** out of ten patients reporting penicillin allergy are **NOT** allergic. <sup>1</sup>.

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

10% of the population reports a penicillin allergy but <1% of the whole population is truly allergic.



Image credit CDC<sup>2</sup>

## Why are these numbers different?

1. It is possible to lose penicillin allergy with time
2. Patients can be mislabeled as allergic

## Can I outgrow my allergy?

**YES!**

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR MY TESTING?

Certain medicines interfere with testing. You will receive a complete list of medications to stop before your visit. Contact our clinic if you have questions.

### References:

1. Drug allergy: an updated practice parameter. Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol. 2010 Oct; 105(4):259-273
2. Image from the following CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/getsmart/week/downloads/getsmart-penicillin-factsheet.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/week/downloads/getsmart-penicillin-factsheet.pdf)



**DukeHealth**



Duke Center for  
Antimicrobial Stewardship  
and Infection Prevention

**Duke Asthma, Allergy and Airway Center**  
1821 Hillandale Rd, #25-A  
Durham, NC 27705  
Phone (919) 620-5300  
<https://aaac.duhs.duke.edu/>

**Duke Health Center South Durham**  
234 Crooked Creek Parkway Suite 400  
Durham, NC 27713  
Phone (919) 620-5300  
<https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-allergy-and-pulmonary-south-durham>

DUHS PFEGC Approved 10/2017  
Developed for Duke Health patients and their loved ones

# Penicillin Allergy

## Are you allergic to penicillin?

Information for Patients and Families



**Duke Asthma, Allergy & Airway Center**  
Duke University School of Medicine

## THIS INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOU IF:

1. You have a history of a penicillin allergy.
2. Your healthcare team has recommended a penicillin allergy evaluation as part of your treatment plan.

## WHY IS PENICILLIN ALLERGY TESTING IMPORTANT?

Penicillin antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections including pneumonia, sinus, throat, and skin infections.

Patients who are listed as having penicillin allergy often receive broad spectrum antibiotics (antibiotics that may be stronger than needed) which may be associated with:

- Longer hospital stays
- Ineffective treatment
- Some antibiotics can lead to new infections (for example severe diarrhea from Clostridium difficile)

## TESTING

Penicillin skin testing can help if you have a history of an allergy to penicillin (rashes, hives, swelling, breathing difficulty are common symptoms of a drug allergy).

## TESTING STEPS

Skin testing can tell if you are still allergic to penicillin. Step 1 is a skin prick test. If you are allergic (positive test), the area where penicillin was placed will become red and possibly itchy. If the skin prick test is negative, a small amount of penicillin will be injected into the skin of your arm.



1) Skin prick test



2) Intradermal test

If both skin tests are negative, this means that you are likely no longer allergic. You will receive amoxicillin (type of penicillin) and will be monitored to make sure that you do not have a reaction.



## TEST RESULTS

If the skin testing is negative and you have no reaction to the oral dose of amoxicillin, you are **NO LONGER** allergic to penicillin.

Penicillin Allergy Test: PATIENT RESULTS

Name: PATIENT  
Date: 3/20/2017

On the above date, I received a penicillin allergy skin test and the results were:

Negative skin test and oral challenge  
 Positive  
 Undetermined  
 Unable to complete test. Recommend outpatient skin testing \_\_\_\_\_

If your test is positive and you need penicillin, an allergist can help you choose other options (desensitization).

## TESTING TIME

On average, the testing and visit will take from 1.5-2 hours.