

PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALLERGY INJECTIONS

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to substances that are harmless to most persons. The reaction is caused by misdirected antibodies called IgE. All IgE antibodies are specific against only 1 allergen. Allergy vaccinations stop the production and effects of these harmful IgE antibodies.

There are three ways of treating allergic illnesses. The first, and best, is avoidance of the cause of the allergy, as in removal of environmental sources of mold, dust mites, elimination of foods proven to cause symptoms, and the removal of pets or their dander from the indoor environment. Second, when avoidance isn't possible, is the attempt to relieve the patient's symptoms with medications. This works well unless symptoms require constant medications or medications are ineffective. Third, is the use of allergy injections to vaccinate and build up the patient's tolerance to the causative allergens. Allergy vaccinations are effective for dust mite proteins, pollens, mold spores, animal proteins, and insect venoms. At the current time, we cannot vaccinate for food allergy, latex, or tobacco allergy are not effective. Allergy drop therapy (under the tongue) is not yet approved in doses necessary to achieve success.

Allergy injections (vaccinations, immunotherapy) consist of injecting a patient with small amounts of the allergens to which they are reactive. By increasing dosages at regular intervals immunity is achieved. After a person is immunized, a 3-4 year process of weaning off the shots is instituted. Patient's sensitive to stinging insects are an exception to this schedule.

Allergy injections are usually started on a twice a week schedule. Most patients require multiple injections at each visit (2-4) in order to include all the relevant allergens in the vaccination program. Improvement starts to show after the first 6 to 12 months on the allergy injections. We like to see each patient back at least every year for a progress evaluation. We retest every two years while patients are on injections. These visits are required to fine-tune the injections, and update the patient's medications and retest when necessary. The total program takes 4-5 years with the first year being the most intense. Injections in the latter years of treatment are usually only every three to four weeks for maintenance of the immunity. Occasionally in our part of the country, where so many year round allergens are found, people tend to need injections over a longer period of time. Elsewhere, where the allergen exposure is lower, intense and lengthy treatment is required.

Allergy vaccines are formulated specific to each individual's particular sensitivities, and therefore cannot be used for anyone but the intended patient. Your allergy vaccine vials can be made in a 6-month to 12-month supply based on the frequency of injections recommended by Dr. Smith. It is very important to receive your injections as scheduled, or the vaccine age will exceed its shelf life. The patient is responsible for the replacement cost of vials remade due to non-compliance with frequency of injections.

Since allergy injections contain materials to which a person is known to be sensitive, there is always a chance of adverse reactions to the vaccine, because the reactions require intensive treatment when severe, we must require that all injections be given in a medical facility equipped to treat severe allergic reactions. We cannot assume responsibility for injections given outside our office, especially those given at home.

A patient should not receive an allergy injection if showing signs of wheezing, febrile (temperature above 101°), significant hives, or a severe allergic eczema flare. If you have experienced any of these symptoms in the previous 24 hours, wait a couple of days before getting your next injections.

Patients receiving allergy injections should wait 30 minutes after each injection before leaving the premises. It is best to have the injection site "checked" before leaving. Should a reaction develop at the site of the injection after leaving the office, please notify the office personnel so that the appropriate steps may be taken to reduce the likelihood of future reactions. Significant local reactions are those larger than a quarter size of swelling. Redness is not a cause for alarm, but please notify your nurse at the next visit before receiving your injections. Local injection reactions can be controlled with cool compresses and antihistamines.

Delayed reactions such as swelling, itching, and warmth are usually not significant since they are from the antibody we are producing with our vaccinations. If delayed reactions are a significant bother, we may dilute the vial for your comfort. Sports rub creams and oral analgesics (i.e. Ibuprofen) can be helpful for these types of reactions.

Some individuals experience the development of wheezing, nasal symptoms, or hives if an injection is too strong. Mild symptoms can be treated with oral or inhaled medication, but severe symptoms should be evaluated by a physician.

Everyone will miss a week or two in their shot schedule on occasion, but frequent lapses in the schedule are detrimental to your progress and may increase your medication needs and chances for reactions to your allergy injections.

Prescription medication called "beta-blockers" (usually used to control of high blood pressure, heart problems and migraine headaches) can increase the risk of all allergic reactions, but especially from allergy injections. If the prescribing physician feels that no alternative medications can be used. We may have to modify "beta-blocker" dose schedules until which time the beta-blocker can be changed, or as a last resort, discontinue the allergy injections.

This immunization process is dynamic and may require frequent communication with myself or my staff. Please feel free to call our office if you have any questions or visit us at our website www.drsmithallergy.com. An understanding of the vaccination process is of great importance in achieving maximum benefits. Your primary care physician should manage routine allergy treatments. If your primary care physician feels you need to see us before your next routine check-up, please call. It's a good idea to see us at least once a year for an evaluation of your new treatment options and from time to time. As these options become available, we may recommend appointments for a new test or medication changes. Again, this is a dynamic field of medicine where changes occur frequently.

We look forward to a successful relationship and providing a good education in allergy matters and optimal allergy care.

How long does one vial last? One vial contains 10 injections. If you are scheduled to receive injections once a week and you are compliant, one vial will last 10 weeks. Vials WILL expire either 6 months or one year from the date they are made depending on the strength of the vial. Expiration means the vials are likely to be too weak to control allergy symptoms because of their age.

How much does it cost? One vial of vaccine presently cost \$110.00, this cost changes as our cost changes. This charge does NOT include the cost of administering the allergy injections. (Remember, the majority of patients receive two or more injections at one time and therefore require multiple vials.) If you do not take the allergy injections at the frequency Dr. Smith prescribes them, your vials will expire before they can be used. This will result in you having to purchase new vials; therefore increasing the cost for your allergy care.

Does my insurance pay for allergy shot treatment? Each patient's insurance company's policy is different. It is IMPERATIVE that YOU call your insurance company with questions about coverage for injections, vaccine, follow-up visits, and testing. Some companies may pay 100% on vaccine and injections, some pay only 80%, some pay after a deductible has been met, some companies pay for vaccine, but not injections. Each plan is different so you should get your coverage explanations straight from your insurance company. Also, watch for changes of insurance plans while receiving injections. If you or your spouse's insurance company changes plans, it is your responsibility to find out the specifics about your new benefits. Be sure to always give our office updated insurance information or changes.

How do I start the allergy injection program? First, please call our office and let our staff know your decision. We will then make your vaccine, a process that takes about one week. You will then be scheduled to receive your 1st injection. After you have received your 1st injection from our office you may continue to get your injections in our office or you may take the vaccine to your family doctor or an Immediate Care Center for injections. You should receive your injection where it is most safe and convenient for you. We may make up to a year's supply of vaccine at one time, depending on what your insurance allows. Making a year's supply of vaccine from the same stock caused less chance of variance in concentration, and assures continuity of care in that vials will be ready for injections when needed; other considerations are savings on paperwork, stamps, and packaging. With a yearly supply of vaccine some insurance companies allow one co-payments per year for vials instead of multiples. If you do not feel that making up a year's supply of vials would be beneficial for you, but would like to start injections, please contact our office for other options.

Instructions if you receive injections from an outside office: Our office does not make new vials unless you or your primary care office orders new vials. We cannot make new vials unless we know on what date your last injections was given, the amount given, and from which vial it was given. When you get your injections outside our office, you must coordinate with the personnel where you receive injections when ordering new vials so they can be ordered and received in a timely manner.

NOTE: if you decide to discontinue injections:

- 1) Do NOT order new vials.
- 2) Call our office and let us know so we can stop your schedule of vaccine.
- 3) If a vial is ordered and made before our office is notified, you will be responsible for payment.

Immunotherapy injections work well if your care is well coordinated!

**Office Hours for Injections:
Monday & Wednesday 7:00 am - 7:00 pm
Tuesday & Thursday 8:00 am - 4:00 pm**

Patient (or Parent if minor)

Date:

Nurse Signature

Date:

06/08