

SKIN PRICK TESTING INFORMATION

Skin prick testing is a sensitive method for detecting and measuring tissue antibodies (IgE) in people suspected of having allergic disease. This method of testing provides high quality diagnostic information when performed and interpreted correctly.

Testing procedure

A drop of allergen extract is placed on the surface of your forearm and the skin is pricked very lightly and superficially through the drop. This causes only minor discomfort, and the procedure can be performed in all age groups (including infants and children).

A positive reaction causes local release of histamine into the skin, producing an itchy wheal similar to a mosquito bite, appearing within 5-10 minutes and fading over 30-60 minutes. You may be tested with anywhere between one and 20 or more allergens, depending on the clinical circumstances.

Along with the allergen extracts, a 'positive control' test with a drop of histamine is always performed to check that your skin is reacting normally. Antihistamine drugs suppress skin test responses, so it is important that you avoid taking them for at least 3 days prior to testing.

Side effects and risks

Localized itching and redness are expected from a positive reaction. Antihistamine cream can be used to relieve the itch if necessary after the test results have been recorded.

In some people, a small tender lump can appear at the site of a positive reaction a few hours later, and may last for a day or so. This is of no diagnostic significance.

Severe allergic reactions following skin prick testing are extremely rare, even in highly allergic people. Testing is always conducted under the supervision of an experienced medical practitioner.

TGA Regulations

Commercially prepared and standardised allergen extracts have been used in Australia and overseas for several decades. The test materials are standardized protein extracts of various allergens in liquid glycerine. Some of these extracts are not currently registered by the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) even though they are manufactured to the same standards and specifications. The benefits and risks of using these products are no different to registered products, but TGA cannot provide a guarantee of their efficacy and quality.

The most widely used unregistered products are supplied by Stallergenes (Alyostal and Greer), Australasian Medical and Scientific (ALK-Abello and Immunotek) and Ferrer Pharma (Diater-DAP, Diater and Nelco Vet DBA Allerglogix). They are produced specifically for the purpose of allergy testing and are similar in their process of manufacture and intended use to the currently registered Hollister-Stier products.

Specialist physicians who are skilled in allergy testing can access the unregistered products by obtaining 'Authorised Prescriber' approval from TGA under Section 19(5) of the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989*, after endorsement by a specialist medical college or an accredited ethics committee. Under the TGA regulations, your written consent is required for skin testing with unregistered products.