

## What is an allergy?

An allergy is an unusual reaction of the body caused by an *allergen*. An allergen is a substance that may get on the skin, be breathed into the body, eaten or injected.

## What are some of the ways allergies can affect my child?

Allergens can affect you by causing your immune system to have a reaction. This can result in symptoms such as:

- Wheezing (asthma)
- Watery eyes and runny nose (allergic rhinitis and hayfever)
- Red, itchy bumps (hives) or eczema on the skin
- Colic, vomiting or diarrhea in babies
- Swelling of the throat causing an acute (severe and intense) shortness of breath

## What will happen at my child's first visit to the Allergy Clinic?

- The clinic staff will measure your child's weight and height and ask you some questions about your child's allergies.
- The doctor will meet with you to get your child's full allergic history and do an examination. The doctor will give special attention to the way in which the symptoms affect your child. For example, if your child has a runny nose, the doctor will pay particular attention to your child's nose.
- The doctor may order some other tests depending on your child's condition. These may include:

- Skin tests
- Blood tests
- Chest x-ray
- Lung function test
- Exercise tolerance test

- The doctor will collect all of this information and make a diagnosis. He/she will then prescribe a treatment for your child.
- The doctor will meet with you to discuss the diagnosis, treatment and any alternatives that you may try. If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss them with your doctor.
- A follow-up visit may be scheduled depending on your child's condition.

## How long will the appointment last?

This appointment will take about two hours to gather all of the information needed to find out what treatment works best for your child.

## How do I prepare my child for the visit?

Do not give your child antihistamines (medicine usually taken to reduce the symptoms of colds and allergic reactions) for at least 3 days before coming to the appointment. Your child may need to stop using some antihistamines and other medication for a longer period of time before you come to the clinic appointment.

- Do not use for 4 weeks before the appointment:
  - Zaditen (Ketofifen)

- Do not use for 7 days before the appointment:
  - Claritin, Allegra, Antidepressants
- Do not use for 4 days before the appointment:
  - Reactine, Atarax
- Do not use for 3 days before the appointment:
  - Benadryl, Chlor-tripolon, Dimetapp, Gravol, any other antihistamines or pills for motion sickness.

If you are not sure about a medication your child is using or if it has to be stopped, be sure to call the allergy clinic and ask about it.

## How can I help my child through the clinic procedures?

There are some pamphlets, books and videotapes available for loan at the Family Resource Library. This is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Ambulatory Care Building. You can visit the Family Resource Library online at [www.cw.bc.ca/library](http://www.cw.bc.ca/library). Here are some resources that might help:

- "Will it Hurt? Helping your Child Cope with Medical Procedures." - Booklet for families.
- "1,2,3 Ouchless" - Booklet for young children.
- "To Tame the Hurting Thing" - video and pamphlet for families and children.
- "Helping your Child Manage Medical and Surgical Procedures" - pamphlet for families.

## What are the tests about?

### Skin Test

This test is done to find out if your child is allergic to certain substances. Drops of suspected allergens are placed on your child's back. Then a sharp point pricks the outer surface of the skin. The sharp prick feels like a cat's scratch and does not cause your child to bleed. Sometimes a few superficial (not deep) injections are given instead of pin pricks. A small red area showing where the allergen was added means a positive allergic reaction. This red area will go away after an hour. The health professionals at the clinic know that these procedures hurt. Things can be done to help relax your child, such as blowing out when it hurts. The clinic staff will help your child feel comfortable during the test.

### Blood test

Sometimes a sample of blood is taken from your child. A blood test will provide more information about white blood cells and allergy antibodies to help diagnose allergy problems. The clinic staff will try to relax and distract your child during this test.

### Chest X-Ray

The child may have a chest x-ray done to rule out any other causes for his or her signs and symptoms.

### Lung Function Test

This test is done if your child's allergies affect their ability to breathe. Your child will be asked to take a deep breath and

blow out as much air as fast as possible into a mouthpiece. The mouthpiece is called a *spirometer*. The speed at which the air is blown out is a measure of how severe the breathing problem is. Your child may find this procedure tiring. They will be given rest periods.

### Exercise Tolerance Test (Stress Test)

This test may be done with children who wheeze when they run. Your child will be asked to blow into a spirometer. They will jog on a treadmill for a few minutes and will then blow into the spirometer again. This test will help assess your child's breathing function when they run and exercise.

**The Allergy Clinic is located in Room 1C23. For questions or concerns please call: (604) 875-2118**

*Developed by the health care professionals of the Allergy Clinic with assistance from the Department of Learning & Development*

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# The Allergy Clinic



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