

Giving your permission for allergy shots

Permission to have allergy shots or allergen immunotherapy

Before the shots are given, you or your legal guardian (if you are under 18), must sign our consent form. Signing the consent form means that you have given your permission to have allergy shots, and that you understand the benefits as well as possible side effects of this treatment.

Allergy shots

Allergy shots are given over a period of time, usually 3 to 5 years or longer. The medical name for these shots is allergen immunotherapy.

The purpose of allergen immunotherapy is to provide protection against your allergy symptoms. The shots contain specific allergens. Allergens are substances in which you are allergic. Types of allergens include pollen and insect venom.

The shots involve giving increasing amounts of allergen to you over several weeks or months. The first shot consists of a small amount of the allergen. The amount will be slowly increased with each shot. When you reach your top amount, this is called your maintenance dose. The rate of increase will depend on how well you tolerate each shot.

Once you begin your allergy shots, it is very important to continue your shots on a regular basis until all the shots are completed. Otherwise, the shots may not be helpful. Allergy shots can be continued throughout pregnancy but the amount should be more carefully watched. It is generally not recommended to start shots for the first time during pregnancy.

At any time during your series of shots, tell your doctor:

- if your asthma is not well controlled
- if you become pregnant
- if you are ill
- of any change to your medications
 - some medications used for high blood pressure or migraine headaches can cause problems with allergy shots
 - beta blockers should not be taken with allergy shots
 - ACE inhibitors may increase the severity of a reaction from allergy shots

Also, if you have a fever, cough, cold, wheeze or if your asthma worsens, please tell the doctor before receiving your next shot. It is best to delay a shot until these symptoms are controlled or gone.

Allergic reaction

An allergic reaction can happen at any time during the series of shots. Because of this risk, you will need to stay in the clinic for at least 30 minutes after each shot so that staff can watch you **but a reaction can also happen after this time.**

Itching, pain or swelling at the area of the shot are the most common reactions.

Rarely, you may have a more serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. What to watch for:

- cough
- wheeze
- shortness of breath
- swelling in the throat
- a sensation of tightness in the chest
- nausea or abdominal pain
- dizziness
- hives
- itching

Anaphylaxis can result in severe illness or death. Tell your doctor or nurse right away if you experience any of these symptoms or feelings, at any time after your shot.

Allergy shots should be given under the skin but never in a muscle or vein. A doctor or nurse gives the shots. You must get your shots at a doctor's office or clinic where medications to treat anaphylaxis are available.

The shot solution should be kept in the refrigerator until used. If it is left out of the refrigerator for too long, or is outdated, it may need to be replaced.

When you begin your series of shots

Before each shot

Do not exercise or overheat your body for at least 2 hours before coming to the clinic. Tell your doctor or nurse if your asthma is not well controlled, or if you are ill.

Tell your doctor or nurse:

- if you think you are pregnant
- if you have had any reactions after the last shot
- if there has been a change in your general health
- if there has been a change in medications

After each shot

- Always wait at least **30 minutes** before leaving the doctor's office.
- Tell the nurse of any reaction or unusual feeling before leaving the office. If a reaction develops, it is most likely to happen within the first 30 minutes.
- Do not exercise and overheat your body for at least 2 hours after your shot to decrease the chance of a delayed reaction.

There is a rare chance that you may have a delayed reaction after leaving the office. To prevent or control the reaction, you should:

- Always carry antihistamines with you such as:
 - Cetirizine or Reactine
 - Desloratadine or Aeries
 - Fexofenadine or Allegra

At the first sign that you may be having a reaction, you should take 1 or 2 of the antihistamines and stop all activity. Phone the doctor or return to the doctor's office right away.

- If the reaction seems severe, go right away to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- If you have an epi-pen, you should also give yourself the epi-pen.

The allergy shots should not be given without regular check-ups with your allergist. You should see your allergist about every 6 to 12 months.