

Skin Prick Test

This leaflet has been written to provide you with information on the Skin Prick Test. It tells you what the test is used for, how it is carried out, the risks of the test, and where you can find more information about it. You should use this information to help you decide if you want to undertake Skin Prick Testing.

WHAT IS THE SKIN PRICK TEST?

The Skin Prick Test is used to investigate patients with possible allergies. This can include allergies that affect the skin causing rashes, the eyes, nose and upper airway (hayfever/allergic rhinitis/allergic conjunctivitis) and the lower airway (asthma). Patients with some types of food allergy can also be investigated with Skin Prick Testing. Prick Test Solutions are usually used to investigate patients with possible allergies, but sometimes we will also ask you to bring fresh foodstuffs to test.

WHAT ARE SKIN PRICK TEST SOLUTIONS?

Prick Test Solutions are preparations containing substances known as allergens. Allergens can trigger an allergic reaction in some people. Prick Test Solutions are used by your doctor or health care professional to help establish which allergens (substances) you may be allergic to. Each prick test solution contains a different allergen, your doctor will decide which ones to test you with.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU ARE TESTED WITH PRICK TEST SOLUTIONS?

We will not be able to use the Prick Test Solution if:

- you know you have an intolerance to phenol, glycerol or any of the other non active ingredients in the test solution (your doctor or nurse will discuss this with you)
- you have any skin damage on the area to be tested (inner or outer part of forearm)
- you are suffering from any serious illness
- you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant

There are some medications that can affect the test. Please tell your doctor if you are taking:

- beta blockers e.g. *atenolol* used in the treatment of conditions such as high blood pressure and heart problems
- antihistamines e.g. *cetirizine* and *fexofenadine* used in the treatment of conditions such as hayfever, rashes and swelling of the face and throat
PLEASE STOP ANTIHISTAMINES AT LEAST 72 HOURS BEFORE HAVING THE PRICK TEST
- corticosteroids e.g. *beclometasone* used in the treatment of conditions such as asthma, running nose and nasal congestion
PLEASE TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT REDUCING YOUR DOSE SLOWLY, SO THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER TAKING CORTICOSTEROIDS 72 HOURS BEFORE HAVING THE PRICK TEST
- mast cell stabilisers e.g. *sodium cromoglicate* used in the treatment of conditions such as running nose, nasal congestion, asthma and itchy or sore eyes
PLEASE STOP MAST CELL STABILISERS AT LEAST 72 HOURS BEFORE HAVING THE PRICK TEST

HOW IS THE SKIN PRICK TEST CARRIED OUT?

You will usually be seen by the doctor or nurse to discuss your allergies and to decide on the tests to be carried out. You will have an opportunity to ask any questions about the test.

You will normally have the prick test on the inner or outer part of your forearm.

- Your skin may first be cleaned with disinfectant
- The nurse will then mark out on your skin what allergies they will test you for, using a skin marker
- A drop of the test solution will be placed on your skin. The surface of your skin will then be pricked through the solution using a very small, sharp lancet
- Do not rub or scratch the site of the prick test
- The nurse will then wait about 10 minutes before seeing if a skin reaction has occurred

- A positive reaction to a particular Prick Test Solution shows as an area of pale raised skin (wheal) with surrounding redness (erythema)

You must wait in the clinic for at least 30 minutes after the prick test. If you experience mild symptoms or signs of an allergic reaction, you will be kept under observation until these symptoms have completely disappeared.

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS OF THE SKIN PRICK TEST?

The Skin Prick Test can cause side effects, but most are mild and not everybody gets them.

- The lancets used to undertake the skin testing are sharp, and so you may feel a slight discomfort or very short lived mild pain during the test.
- You may get swelling or irritation at the site of the prick test, during the test, or later on after the test. This is nothing to be concerned about and can be treated with oral antihistamines or a topical corticosteroid.
- A severe allergic reaction called anaphylactic shock can develop a few minutes after having the prick test, often before a local reaction has appeared. Symptoms include:
 - General itching and feeling of heat – especially affecting scalp, mouth, throat, palms or soles
 - Severe wheezing, or noisy or difficult breathing
 - Severe hives/nettle rash
 - Swelling of the lips or throat
 - Pale or greyish skin colour
 - A fast heart beat
 - Faintness or collapse

Tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist immediately if you get a runny nose, rash, have difficulty breathing or you are wheezing.

Anaphylactic shock is exceptionally rare during skin prick testing, but if it occurs it is likely you will need treatment with emergency medicines, and require to stay in hospital until you have fully recovered.

- You may experience delayed side effects a few hours after exposure to the allergen, though this is rare. If this happens please see your doctor immediately.
- If you get any side effects, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. This includes any possible side effects not listed in this leaflet.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SKIN PRICK TEST?

If you would like any further information about the Skin Prick Test or if you have any concerns about the test you should discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

Further patient information on the Skin Prick Test is available online at:
www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.8017.pdf