

# Drug Challenge

**This leaflet explains a drug challenge, including the benefits, risks and any alternatives and what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.**

## What is a drug challenge?

A drug challenge tests whether your child is allergic or tolerant to a particular drug (medicine). It is carried out under close medical supervision. There are different ways to do this test but we usually start by giving your child a very low dose of the medicine being tested and gradually increase the dose whilst monitoring for an allergic reaction. A drug challenge usually lasts around four to six hours.

For antibiotic drug challenges, the medicine will be taken for a further three days at home after the challenge, to ensure that your child does not have a delayed reaction to the drug.

## Why should my child have a drug challenge?

A drug challenge has been offered to your child as the clinician who saw your child in the Allergy Clinic determined that it is likely that your child will be able to tolerate the medicine. A drug challenge will confirm whether your child is allergic or tolerant to that particular drug.

If your child does not experience any allergic symptoms, then we can be confident that they do not have an allergy to that medicine and they can take it in the future, if needed.

### **What are the risks?**

Your child may have an allergic reaction to the drug being tested. This is why the test is performed in hospital and not at home. We will carefully monitor your child during the test and a doctor will always be available if needed.

If your child experiences an allergic reaction, we will stop the test immediately. Medicine(s) will be given to relieve any symptoms and to stop the reaction from getting worse; this medicine may be an antihistamine such as cetirizine or, in the case of a more severe reaction, an adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen®, Jext®).

### **Are there any alternatives?**

You may choose for your child not to have a drug challenge and just continue to avoid the drug to which they might be allergic. Please understand that a drug challenge is the only safe and sure way to find out whether your child is allergic or tolerant to the drug.

### **How can I prepare my child for the drug challenge?**

Preparing your child for their hospital visit will help them to understand what is happening and can improve their willingness to cooperate on the day. Talking to them beforehand will give them time to ask any questions they may have. Always give truthful, factual information.

You may wish to bring some familiar toys or books with you to help your child feel at ease. Your child can eat a light snack and drink during the challenge and also have lunch, usually once the challenge is completed. Please bring a packed lunch. We will provide the drug for your child's challenge. You will need to stay with your child at all times during the challenge, so you may want to bring some food for yourself too.

Your child must be well with no cough, cold or recent infections for at least two weeks before the challenge. If they have asthma or eczema this must be well controlled and stable.

If your child is taking medications, please follow these instructions:

**Antihistamines:** Your child may be taking a regular antihistamine such as chlorpheniramine, cetirizine or loratadine (Piriton®, Zirtek® or Clarityn®). These will need to be stopped five days before the challenge. Some cough medicines will also contain antihistamine (e.g. Tixylix®).

**Asthma medication:** Your child should continue to take their regular preventative asthma inhalers (usually brown, orange or purple).

**Blue inhalers (Ventolin® or Bricanyl®):** if your child is wheezy, coughing or has needed their blue inhaler more often than usual in the two weeks before the challenge, please contact the allergy team on 020 8725 4219, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) between 8am to 4pm before the challenge day to discuss this further.

Please bring your child's allergy medications with you on the challenge day, including the adrenaline auto-injector(s), if they have any. Please complete the checklist at the end of this leaflet to make sure your child can have the test.

### **What happens on the day of the drug challenge?**

On arrival we will explain the challenge in detail and answer any questions you or your child may have. We will ask you to sign a consent form on behalf of your child (the person attending the appointment with your child must be the parent or legal guardian). The nurse will then make sure your child is fit and well to have the

challenge, take their temperature, blood pressure and oxygen levels.

Your child may be given the medication in one dose or in several increasing doses.

For increasing doses, these will be given at 30 minute intervals.

Most drug challenges are to oral medications (as liquids, not tablets).

We will then observe your child for two to four hours before discharge. We will treat any reaction as needed. In the unlikely event of a serious reaction, your child may need to stay in hospital overnight.

### **What will happen after the challenge day?**

For some medicines such as antibiotics, after a negative (successful) challenge, we will give you a short course of the medicine to give your child at home, so we can be sure that they are not allergic to a course of the medicine. We will explain this more on the day.

A member of the team will contact you the following week to check that the medicine was taken and was tolerated.

We will write a letter to your child's GP and other doctors after the appointment to let him / her know whether your child is allergic to the medicine and confirm whether it is safe to prescribe in the future.

### **Pre challenge check list**

<b>Drug Challenge Check List For Parent and Child</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
We understand why my child is being offered a drug challenge		
We understand the benefits of the drug challenge		

We are happy to go ahead with the drug challenge		
My child has not taken any antihistamines for five days before the challenge		
My child has not been unwell in the two weeks before the challenge (e.g. with fever, a cold, a sore throat, tummy bug or a flare of their asthma, hay fever or eczema)		

### Useful sources of information

Anaphylaxis Campaign: Tel. 01252 542 029

[Anaphylaxis UK | Supporting people with serious allergies | Anaphylaxis UK](#)

Allergy UK [Allergy UK | National Charity](#) or 01322 619898

### Contact us

If you have any questions or worries about a food challenge, please call the allergy nurses on 020 8725 4219, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) between 8.00am to 4.00pm.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

**Was this information helpful? Yes / No**

**Please let us know, contact**

**[patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk) and include the leaflet title.**

**Thank you.**

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## **Additional services**

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453   **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### **NHS UK**

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

### **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website

([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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