

Child Health Information

Allergy Clinic Pre-appointment advice for Children & Young people: General Allergy

What is Allergy?



An allergy occurs when your immune system, which normally fights infection, overreacts to a substance called an allergen. Most allergens are normally harmless and do not affect people who are not allergic to them. Allergic reactions can vary from mild to life-threatening. This leaflet covers allergens such as fish, shellfish, soya, sesame, pollen, animals, mould and latex. We have specific leaflets for support with nut, milk and egg allergy.

When someone comes into contact with something that they are allergic to (an allergen), a group of cells called mast cells, release a substance called histamine. Histamine causes the tiny blood vessels in the tissues of the body to leak fluid which causes the tissues to swell. This results in a number of different symptoms, which are discussed in more detail later in this advice sheet. Sometimes it is difficult to know what is causing allergic reactions and for some children and young people allergic reactions can occur with no obvious cause.



What can I do to keep myself or my child safe?

While you are waiting for your specialist allergy appointment, it is important to be aware of how you can keep your child safe until you are seen in clinic and given a diagnosis.

With an environmental allergen such as pollen, mould and animals it can be helpful to take an antihistamine prior to coming into contact with that allergen if you are able. If you are regularly coming into contact with an animal or pollen, then taking a non-drowsy antihistamine regularly can reduce symptoms. Your GP or Pharmacist can also give advice on other medications such as nasal sprays or eye drops. There is in depth advice on the Allergy UK website about house dust mite, pollen and animal allergies. (Website address at the end of the leaflet)

If you think your child has reacted to a food avoiding **that allergen** is a sensible precaution until they can be seen at their appointment.

In order to discover which foods contain your suspect allergen you will need to **read the ingredients list** of any packets of foods that your child may eat, or ask in restaurants if your child's food is likely to contain the allergen you are concerned about. Many restaurants now have websites with allergen listings for any food served in their establishment, or will have a folder onsite containing such information.

This would involve avoiding eating the food itself, including any food that states "may contain" the ingredient for example:

- Bakery products, Cake or Confectionary that contain the ingredient
- Take-away or restaurant foods such as Chinese and Thai food
- Ready meals and sauces that contain the ingredient

All pre-packaged foods in the UK must declare on the label or ingredients list whether a product contains the most common food allergens. These will be highlighted in **bold** text in the ingredients list. The allergens which must be highlighted on the ingredients list are:

Nuts, Peanuts, Milk, Eggs, Fish, Shellfish, Molluscs (Mussels, Clams etc) Soya, Celery, Sulphites, Sesame, Mustard, Cereals (Wheat, Oats etc) or Lupin.

The allergy clinic also has specific advice leaflets about nut, egg and milk allergies. These can be found on the RUH website patient and visitor section.



What should I look out for if my child or I have a reaction to something?

Symptoms can vary considerably in allergy, and each reaction can be different.

The **milder symptoms** could include:

- Itchy 'nettle type' rash – sometimes described as hives
- Tingly itchy feeling in the mouth
- Feeling sick or nauseous or upset tummy

More **serious symptoms** could include:

- Swelling around the face/mouth or throat
- Difficulty swallowing or speaking
- Sudden severe asthma/breathing difficulties
- Severe abdominal pain, sudden vomiting
- Feeling faint or losing consciousness

Are there any medications that could help?

You should obtain antihistamine syrup or tablets such as Chlorphenamine or Cetirizine. Your GP can prescribe this medication or for older children these are available without prescription (e.g. Piriton[®], Piriteze[®], Zirtek[®]). Keep antihistamine with you and your child at all times. Having this medication available is a way to keep safe and gives you reassurance that you can support your child if they become unwell. If your child has an asthma inhaler they should also have that with them at all times. Your GP or Pharmacist can give advice on other medications such as nasal sprays or eye drops.

What should I do if my child or I have a reaction to something?

If your child has a reaction to something, try and keep as calm as you can. In the first instance, giving them the age appropriate dose of the antihistamine should help them if the symptoms are mild. You should then seek medical advice from your GP, NHS 111, Out of Hours service or Minor injuries Unit if symptoms do not improve or worsen.

If at any point you are worried that symptoms seem to be getting severe, you should seek urgent medical advice by calling NHS 111.



Should the symptoms involve breathing difficulties or a loss of consciousness, call 999 and tell the ambulance service that your child has had an allergic reaction and describe the child's symptoms.

The details of any allergic reaction to an allergen provide more information towards discovering the likely cause of the allergy. Any information you can remember after getting medical help can be useful, such as:

- Photos
- Food diary
- Description of what symptoms occurred and their severity
- What they were eating at the time of reaction or earlier that day (this may include ingredients lists from food packets)
- Whether they were already unwell on the day of the reaction
- Details of any other substances which are linked to reactions eg ingredients list on toiletries and cosmetics

Useful Websites

The Anaphylaxis Campaign; www.anaphylaxis.org.uk Helpline number: 01252 542029

Allergy UK; www.allergyuk.org Helpline number: 01322 619898

NHS website; www.nhs.uk/conditions/Allergies

Thank you for taking the time to read this. The allergy team looks forward to meeting you in clinic.

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.