

Allergy Immunotherapy (Allergy Shots): What You Should Know

What are allergy shots?

Allergy immunotherapy (“allergy shots”) are shots given regularly to decrease sensitivity to a specific, allergy-producing substance. It is the only method that offers a “cure” for allergies. Shots would be a good fit for people whose symptoms are hard to control with other medications, those who have a hard time avoiding certain allergens, and those with year-long symptoms or severe symptoms. Patients must be able to follow the program plan to receive allergy shots.

When will my allergy symptoms improve?

If you are receiving treatment for inhaled allergens, such as pollen, dust mites, mold and animals, you probably will not notice any difference in how you feel until you have received maintenance therapy for at least 5-6 months. It may take up to 18-24 months before you notice any benefit. Allergy immunotherapy does **not** provide immediate relief. For people allergic to insect stings (venom immunotherapy), the treatment usually takes 4-6 months of maintenance shots before you are protected.

How often do I get my shots?

To begin, every 3-10 days you will come in and receive a shot(s), this is called the “building process”. The building process only takes 15 weeks if you do not miss a dose and you receive your allergy shot(s) twice per week. When you finish the building process you will need to receive your shot(s) every 7-28 days for at least 5 years. If you stop immunotherapy for more than four weeks, your next dose will need to be reduced for safety. If you have any questions, contact your allergist.

When shouldn't I get my shots?

There are certain conditions where you will have to stop or change your treatment to avoid the risk of a bad reaction. Follow these precautions to continue your treatments safely:

- Avoid strenuous exercise and exposure to excessive heat for 2 hours before and after shots.
- If you have had a recent change in your health status, including a “cold”, fever, pregnancy, excessive hay fever or any asthma symptoms, or if you have been prescribed new prescription medications, please report this to the person giving you your shot(s).
- **If you are sick, please make an appointment to see a doctor.**
- If you are unsure if you should get your shot(s), please call our office.

How long will I need to continue treatment?

To successfully treat your allergies, you will have to receive year-round shots for several (usually at least 5) years. Ask your allergist (allergy doctor) when you meet with them if you have questions about your shots and how long you will continue them.

When will I need to meet with my allergist?

You will need a visit with your allergist at least once per year to continue receiving your allergy shots, even if you have your shots given by your primary care doctor. **If you receive your shots at another office, please bring a copy of your shot record to your annual visit.** It is best to schedule a return visit for during your peak allergy season. You will not receive another skin test unless you request it or if your doctor thinks it is necessary.

Where do I receive treatment?

You will need to receive your first shot(s) at our office. Depending on your insurance and your primary care doctor, you may need to continue your shots

at your primary care doctor's office. You will need to contact your primary care doctor and make arrangements to receive your shots at their office.

What is my part in immunotherapy treatment?

- Monitor your reaction to each shot. Notice if you have any local itching, redness, swelling or feel different (unwell) in any way after each shot. If you have an increase in allergy symptoms promptly following your shot, report this **immediately** to the person who gave you your shot. Report any type of reaction to the person giving you your shot(s) before you get the next shot(s) so your dose can be adjusted appropriately.
- You must take your antihistamine, if prescribed daily, before every immunotherapy appointment.
- You also must bring your bronchodilator (if you have asthma) and your epinephrine auto injector, if prescribed, to each shot appointment.

May I continue taking medications with my allergy shots?

Yes, please continue taking all of your prescribed allergy medications.

- Talk to you your allergist before discontinuing any allergy medication.
- Tell your allergist or allergy nurse about any changes to your medications prescribed by your other health care professionals.
- **Do not take** Beta-Adrenergic Blocking Agents (BETA BLOCKERS) while receiving **Immunotherapy**. In addition, **do not take** Angiotensin Converting Enzyme Inhibitors (ACE-Inhibitors) while on **Venom Immunotherapy**. These medications may be prescribed for high blood pressure, migraines, glaucoma or other heart problems. If you have questions, please ask before receiving your shot(s).

What are the risks?

Allergic reactions can occur where the shot is given (locally) or occur elsewhere on the body (generalized). Local swelling following an allergy shot is not unusual. Discuss any local reaction with your nurse. Generalized reactions to

allergy shots are uncommon and very rarely may be life threatening or even fatal.

Reactions almost always begin within 30 minutes after the shot(s). Because of this risk, your doctor must supervise your immunotherapy in a place where you can receive immediate emergency medical care in case you have a reaction to the shot. For this reason, you **must** wait at least **30 minutes** in the treatment area after each shot. You must do this with **every** shot, because serious reactions can happen even after you have been receiving immunotherapy at the same dose for several years.

What is a reaction?

Local reaction

Itching, redness or swelling (smaller than the size of a 50 cent piece) that goes away overnight are common reactions to the shots. Larger and longer-lasting reactions may be more serious. Use a cool pad to help soothe a local reaction or take a dose of antihistamine such as diphenhydramine or cetirizine. Before you get your next shot(s), tell the person giving you your shot the size and length of time of your local reaction. This helps them determine your next safe dose.

Generalized reaction

Symptoms of a reaction elsewhere on the body (generalized):

- Itchy eyes, nose or throat, runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Tightness in the chest, wheezing, cough, asthma
- Hives
- Itching of palms, scalp, soles of feet, or elsewhere
- Swelling of eye lids, face, or extremities
- Flushing or feeling of intense warmth
- Faintness
- Sudden development of nausea, abdominal cramps, or diarrhea
- Anaphylactic shock

Inform the person who gave you your shot(s) **immediately** if you feel unwell in any way because an untreated generalized reaction is dangerous. If a generalized reaction occurs after leaving our office do the following:

- First take a dose of antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) or cetirizine (Zyrtec®)
- Then use your bronchodilator (if you have asthma) and use your epinephrine auto injector (if prescribed)
- Call 911

Do not delay care by calling your allergist's office. After receiving emergency treatment, please call the office to inform us.

How long does my extract (vials for allergy shots) last?

Your allergy extract may be used for up to one year from the day it is made, if it is refrigerated and depending on the concentration. Venom extract may be used for 6 months to 1 year after being diluted and depending on the concentration.

When will my immunotherapy be re-ordered?

- If you are receiving your shots **in our office**, we will contact you for your permission to reorder your shots before the expiration date or before your bottle is completely empty. Note: Your insurance will be charged when the extract is mixed, not on the date of authorization.
- If you are receiving your shots **at another office**, their office staff will be responsible for reordering your extracts. The office staff will need to fax or mail us your most recent shot documentation. They may fax the paperwork to (734) 212-2147.

Make sure they reorder your extract at least one month prior to the expiration date or when your bottle has approximately four shots remaining. It may take up to four weeks for your healthcare provider to receive your new

immunotherapy. Contact your provider to make sure your immunotherapy has arrived.

What happens when I get new bottles of my immunotherapy?

When you start new bottles, the dose will be decreased because of the increased potency of the new bottle. You will need to receive your allergy shot(s) every one to two weeks until you reach your maintenance dose. Venom immunotherapy dose is not decreased when a new bottle is started.

What is the contact information?

After hours, for non-life threatening concerns, you may call our allergy physician on call. Please call U of M paging at (734) 936-6267 and follow the directions to contact the physician.

Allergy shot hours:

You must set up an appointment for your allergy shots. We offer appointments at five locations:

Domino's Farm

(734) 647-5940
Toll Free (888) 229-2409
24 Frank Lloyd Wright Drive
Lobby H - 2100
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Northville

(248) 305-4400
39901 Traditions Drive
Suite 210
Northville, MI 48168

Briarwood

(734) 647-9000
325 Briarwood Circle, Building 5
Ann Arbor, MI 48108

West Ann Arbor Parkland Plaza

(734) 647-5940
Toll Free (888) 229-2409
380 Parkland Plaza
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Brighton Center for Specialty Care

(734) 647-5940
Toll Free (888) 229 2409
7500 Challis Rd.
Brighton, MI 48116

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