

Penicillin Skin Testing: Are You Still Allergic?

Your healthcare team thinks penicillin skin testing may be right for you.

Why is it important to get tested for a penicillin allergy?

Penicillin is a drug (antibiotic) used to treat infection. 9 out of 10 people who believe they have a penicillin allergy are not truly allergic and they can safely take penicillin and related antibiotics. If you are still avoiding penicillin because you think you are allergic it may lead to further medical problems. You may be prescribed other antibiotics which can be more expensive, less effective and more likely to cause greater side effects. Some alternative antibiotics can lead to severe diarrhea caused by a germ called *Clostridium difficile*, also known as *C. diff*. For these reasons, Penicillin allergy has been linked to longer and more expensive hospital stays.

How is it possible that I am no longer allergic?

You may be able to take penicillin-based antibiotics now because penicillin allergies can change. The most common reasons your allergy may have changed are:

- People lose their allergy to penicillin over time
- 4 out of 5 people lose their sensitivity over 10 years
- Your initial reaction may not have been caused by penicillin
- Your initial reaction was a side effect rather than an allergic reaction

Penicillin skin testing is the best way to determine if you are still allergic to penicillin. A test can help if, in the past, penicillin has given you:

- Rashes
- Itching
- Hives
- Swelling in your face or throat
- Low Blood Pressure

How do penicillin allergy skin tests work?

There are two types of skin tests. In the first, a drop of penicillin is pricked or scratched on the surface of your arm. If you are allergic, you will have a small spot of redness or itching where the penicillin was placed.

If you are negative, we will give you a second test. For this test, we will place a small amount of penicillin into the skin of your upper arm.

How long does it take to get skin test results?

For both types of skin tests, positive reactions such as redness and itching at the test spot usually appear within 15 minutes. If both tests are negative, you will receive a test dose of a penicillin drug. You will be monitored for an allergic reaction for 60 minutes.

If your penicillin skin test is negative and you have no reaction to your test dose, you are no longer allergic to penicillin. Your chance of an allergic reaction to penicillin-based antibiotics is as low as it is for most people. We will update your medical records at Michigan Medicine to show that you are not allergic to a penicillin drug. In addition, we will notify your primary care provider and any other providers caring for you.

If your penicillin skin test is positive, then you are still allergic to penicillin. We would recommend that you continue to avoid penicillin drugs at this time.

What are the benefits of penicillin skin testing?

- Knowing if you are allergic to penicillin is important because penicillin antibiotics are the best treatment options available for many illnesses.
- Penicillin antibiotics are often less expensive than other antibiotics.
- Other antibiotics may cause side effects.
- Antibiotics without penicillin may lead to drug resistance (commonly called "super bugs"), which make antibiotics less effective in the future.

What is the contact information to set up an appointment?

To discuss penicillin skin testing with an allergist or to set up an appointment contact:

- **Locations:**
 1. **Allergy Specialty Clinic and Food Allergy Clinic at Domino's Farms**
24 Frank Lloyd Wright Drive, Lobby H, Suite H-2100, Ann Arbor, MI 48106
 2. **Brighton Center for Specialty Care**
7500 Challis Road, Brighton, MI 48116
 3. **Northville Health Center**
Suite 210, 39901 Traditions Way, Northville, MI 48168
 4. **West Ann Arbor Health Center – Parkland Plaza**
380 Parkland Plaza, Ann Arbor, MI 48103
- **Phone:** (734) 647-5940
- **Website:** <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/intmed/divisions/allergy-clinical-immunology>

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