

Subcutaneous immunotherapy

What is subcutaneous immunotherapy for aeroallergens?

Also known as desensitization, subcutaneous immunotherapy (SCIT) is the process of administering regular injections of a substance in the environment, that a person is allergic to (an aeroallergen). The person's own immunity is engaged to help control or reduce the allergic reaction. An extract of the environmental aeroallergen is injected into the arm subcutaneously. This is administered regularly over a period of 3 years. The dose will gradually be increased over a short period and then continued monthly.

While SCIT may not always completely cure an allergy, it can significantly reduce symptoms in most patients for up to 20 years.

Generally, it takes at least 6-12 months, sometimes longer, to see an improvement once the desensitization process has started.

Why have SCIT?

SCIT is often the recommended treatment for allergic rhinitis (hay fever) due to a pollen or dust mite allergy (and sometimes asthma) when:

- symptoms are severe
- the cause is difficult to avoid (such as grass pollen)
- asthma is triggered by aeroallergens
- medications do not help relieve symptoms or cause adverse side effects
- people prefer to avoid medications.

While undergoing SCIT, your child can still use allergy medications and must continue asthma medications as usual.

On the day of your child's injection

Your child should be feeling well. If your child has asthma, they may have to undergo a pulmonary function test (PFT) prior to their first appointment. If your child is unwell up to 24 hours prior to the appointment, please call the Immunology Department to arrange for the appointment to be rescheduled.

Please give your child a non-drowsy antihistamine about 30 minutes to one hour before having their injection to reduce any itchiness, redness and swelling that may occur at the injection site.



Your child's first injection will be given in the Outpatient Department at Perth Children's Hospital (PCH) by a clinical nurse consultant or clinical nurse. If there is no reaction to this dose your child will receive the rest of the treatment doses at your GP clinic.

Injections will initially be given weekly with the dose increasing gradually over a 6-week period. When your child tolerates a dosage of 0.5mls with no reaction, the dose will be given every 4 weeks for 3-5 years.

After an injection, your child should not do any strenuous exercise or sport for four hours as this can increase the chance of a reaction.

Local and adverse reactions to SCIT

Many patients undergo SCIT with no problems but allergic reactions to the injections can sometimes occur. Most allergic reactions are mild, such as redness and swelling at the injection site. If your child experiences this type of reaction, you can use ice packs or antihistamine gel to treat their symptoms. Paracetamol can be administered for pain relief.

Mild or moderate reactions include itching, swelling of the lips, face, eyes or other parts of the body, and sneezing. These symptoms can be treated with an antihistamine. Your child should be observed by a GP until their symptoms subside.

In the event of a severe reaction such as anaphylaxis (coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing, collapsing), your doctor should give your child adrenaline and follow the guidelines provided to them. If your child experiences a severe reaction, please contact the Immunology Department before proceeding with the next injection.

You must notify your doctor if your child will miss any injections due to illness or being away. If this occurs the dose of the next injection and the time between injections may need to be adjusted.

You must not stop your child's SCIT treatment once started unless there has been a reaction. If there has been a prolonged delay in treatment, please contact the Immunology Department as adjustment to the schedule may need to be made.

Your child's appointments

Your child will need to come to hospital for their first appointment to commence immunotherapy. You will be required to go to the PCH Pharmacy, Level 1, to collect the allergen immunotherapy medication prior to the appointment.

If you are living outside the metropolitan area, it may be possible for you to start treatment at your local GP clinic.

Your child will be followed up with a 12-month call after commencing immunotherapy. You will be able to contact the allergy clinical nurse consultant if you have any concerns regarding the treatment.

Three years after commencing immunotherapy you will be contacted by an allergy clinical nurse to confirm the completion of treatment and determine if further follow up is required by an immunologist.

Ordering and storage of allergens

- Further scripts can be ordered via phone or email:
paediatric.immunology@health.wa.gov.au
- Please ensure to state your child's name, date of birth and the type of aeroallergen script required.
- Please allow 7-10 business days for ordering of scripts.
- Medication is kept in a fridge.

Contact

- PCH Immunology Department: 6456 4360 (general enquires, change of appointments).
- Allergy clinical nurse consultant: 6456 4367 (clinical enquiries Monday to Friday 8am-4pm).
- Email: paediatric.immunology@health.wa.gov.au for allergen immunotherapy scripts.



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service

Child and Adolescent Health Service
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.
Telephone: (08) 6456 2222
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