

CENTRAL MASS ALLERGY & ASTHMA CARE

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IMMUNOTHERAPY

ALLERGY INJECTIONS

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy involves injections of the very things to which you are allergic called allergens. For example, if your skin test showed that you are allergic to trees; small amounts of tree pollen extract will be used in your allergy vaccine.

2) Will my insurance cover my allergy injections?

Insurance coverage varies. Some insurance companies require that you pay a co-payment for an allergy injection. Please call our billing office if you need more information.

3) How do shots work?

By gradually increasing the dose over time, your body will build up a resistance to the allergen. You will then have fewer symptoms when exposed naturally. If you are getting shots for your tree allergy you should notice less sneezing, itchy eyes, etc. in the spring when tree pollen is in the air. Allergy shots help only with those allergens included in your injections. Tree pollen shots will not help a cat or dust allergy.

4) How soon should do the shots start to work?

Because the injections are started at a very low dose, they generally do not start working for about three to six months. Sometimes it takes a year or two to notice significant improvement.

5) How often do I get the injections?

Allergy shots are given weekly in the buildup period, which is generally about six months or 25 weeks. Once a fairly high dose called maintenance is reached, the shots are gradually given less often. They are usually continued every four weeks. During a pollen season more frequent injections can be helpful. Injections also may be given twice a week, with a separation of at least 2 days. This cuts down on the buildup time to 13 weeks.

6) When can I get the shots?

Included is an injection schedule with our office walk-in hours. If your primary care physician's office is more convenient for you, we will provide complete instructions so you may take your allergy vaccine there. **A physician must be present at that location while you receive your injection.** The precautions listed on this sheet are even more important to follow if your injections are given at another doctor's office. If you have a fever or are feeling ill you may not be given an injection.

7) How long do I need to take shots for?

Allergy injections are usually given for three to five years, though a few people benefit from a longer course of treatment. If the injections do not start to help within two years they should probably be stopped or changed. A yearly checkup with the doctor to review progress is required while on injections.

8) What happens if I miss a shot?

Missing an occasional shot or being late does not affect the long-term benefit. The doctor or nurse will adjust the dosage to a safe level. If you miss shots for many weeks you may not build up to a high enough dose for them to be helpful. Consult with our clinical staff if you will need to miss several visits.

9) Are allergy injections safe?

Allergy injections have been used for more than 80 years with no serious long-term side effects. They can cause an allergic reaction starting shortly after the shot is given.

10) What are the side effects of allergy injections?

The most common side effect of an allergy injection is a small amount of redness, itching or swelling at the injection site. Sometimes a person will notice some mild allergy symptoms within 24 hours after a shot. Tell the nurse at your next injection visit so an adjustment in dose can be made if it is indicated.

More serious allergic reactions, called systematic reactions are rare. Symptoms include itching, hives, throat tightness, wheezing, and shortness of breath, dizziness or light-headedness. Life-threatening reactions are extremely rare but a few deaths have occurred after allergy shots. **For this reason you should always stay in the doctor's office for 30 minutes after your injections no matter how long you have been getting them.**

11) HOW TO PREVENT SERIOUS REACTIONS - Take these precautions!

1. Wait the 30 minutes in the doctor's office after injections.
2. Inform the nurse before your next shot of any swelling at the injection site that appears larger than the size of a quarter.
3. Always, call us immediately or go directly to the emergency room if you notice any breathing difficulty, generalized itching or rash, or feel especially ill shortly after your shot.
4. Let us know as soon as possible if you become pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant.
5. Inform us of any new medications that you are taking. Certain medications such as beta-blockers (taken for high blood pressure, glaucoma, migraine headaches and other diseases) or monoamine oxidase inhibitors can be dangerous if you have a reaction to a shot.
6. Asthma patients need to let us know if they are having any current problems. When peak flow readings are less than 70% of your best, you should not receive a shot that day. Speak with our clinical staff if you are unsure.
7. If you have a fever or are feeling ill, you may not be given a shot. You will not be given an injection if you have hives or wheezing. Call ahead or inform clinical staff before your injection.
8. Avoid strenuous exercise at least an hour after your injection.

12) Do I still take allergy medication?

The goal of immunotherapy is to control your allergy symptoms without medications. You may still need to take some medications to control your allergy symptoms. Using a medication will not decrease the benefits of allergy shots.

13) Do I still continue to see the allergy doctor?

Yes. A yearly visit is needed to monitor your allergies and general health, update progress, re-access medications and reissue any prescriptions. A more frequent visit may be required for asthmatic patients. If you receive injections at another office, you should bring your injection schedule with you as well as any empty serum vials if you are renewing a serum prescription at the same time.

14) How long will my current vaccine last?

Your vaccine expires in one year. Your new vaccine will be a little stronger (vaccine loses some of its potency over time) so the dosage will be cut back slightly and you will have to build back up. You can do this by coming in twice a week, weekly or every two weeks. It usually takes 3 doses to be back up to maintenance.

WE WANT ALLERGY INJECTIONS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE. IF YOU HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ASK.

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