

## Preparing for your immunotherapy

So we can ensure that your treatment is safe, please inform someone from the clinic if you:

- Have been unwell (e.g. a fever) within the 24 hours before treatment.
- Have experienced allergic symptoms within the 3-4 days before treatment.
- Develop any side effects.
- Are taking regular medications and have had any changes to these.
- Have received a vaccination within the last 7 days before treatment.
- Have any chronic conditions such as asthma, heart and/or lung disease, immune disorders.

Before your injection, avoid large meals and alcohol. We recommend that you take an antihistamine tablet (e.g. Cetirizine 10mg) one hour prior to your clinic visit/injection. Antihistamines can be purchased from your local pharmacy who will be able to advise you on the one most suitable for you.

After the injection, please do not take any strenuous exercise for 12 hours and avoid having a hot bath. Alcohol should be avoided for at least 4 hours afterwards.

## Useful tips to avoid getting stung

- Move away slowly and don't panic - avoid provoking bees and wasps.
- Wear clothing that covers most of the body (particularly the feet).
- Always wear shoes when outdoors.
- Avoid wearing bright colours, flowery prints and using products with strong scents – these can trick wasps and bees into thinking you are a flower!
- If gardening, wear long sleeves, long trousers and gloves.
- Keep food and drink covered when eating and drinking outside - wasps can crawl inside cans where they are not seen.
- Avoid flowering plants, outdoor areas where food is served, rubbish and compost
- Regularly and carefully remove any fallen fruit in your garden and keep a well-fitting lid on dustbins.
- Keep doors and windows closed
- Drive with the windows up and the air conditioner on.



## Bee and Wasp Venom Immunotherapy

### Patient Information Leaflet

#### Immunology Service

#### Haematology and Oncology Directorate

Specialist Nurse tel: 01782 672504

Secretary's tel: 01782 674284

#### Further information

[www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

Allergy UK, Planwell House, LEFA Business Park,  
Edgington Way, Sidcup, Kent. DA14 5BH

Tel: 01322 619898

#### Patient Advice and Liaison Service

Tel: 01782 676450

Email: [patientadvice.uhnm@nhs.net](mailto:patientadvice.uhnm@nhs.net)

## What is allergy?

Allergies occur when the immune system makes an inappropriate response to something harmless. In the case of bee and wasp allergy this is caused by an allergy antibody (IgE) reacting to bee or wasp venom. This can, in some people, cause severe reactions called anaphylaxis.



## What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy, also called desensitisation, is the only treatment that can reduce the risk of anaphylaxis in individuals who are allergic to bees or wasps. The treatment involves administering small amounts of the protein which the person is allergic to (which is called an allergen) so that the body can slowly “get used” to it. This will reduce the chances of the person having a severe reaction if they are stung by the bee or wasp again.

This treatment is very effective, providing 98% protection against serious wasp venom reactions and about 90% protection against serious reactions to a bee sting.

## What your treatment involves

Immunotherapy treatment is given as injections into the fatty layer of tissue just beneath the skin (subcutaneously).

Initially, you will receive slowly increasing doses of the venom allergen on a weekly basis for 12 weeks. We will then give a maintenance dose every 4 to 6 weeks for up to 2 years and then 6-8 weekly for the third (final) year.

The injections will be administered in the outpatient department under medical supervision. You will be asked to stay for one hour after your injection in case of any reactions. If you feel unwell after the injection you will be asked to stay a little longer.

At each visit we will record details of any symptoms you experience after the injection. This is so we can adjust your dose regime depending upon your symptoms.

## What happens if I miss my injection?

It is important that you try and attend your appointments as per the schedule.

If you miss your injections you may have to reduce the scheduled dose. If many treatments are missed, it may be necessary to re-start the treatment.

## What side effects can occur?

The common side effects include:

- Swelling and redness at the injection site, which may be quite large in cases.
- Nettle rash, tiredness, flushing.
- Itchy eyes and runny nose or wheezing.

Most symptoms are mild and usually settle. This does not mean that treatment would have to be stopped. You may apply ice and take an antihistamine for injection site reactions. If you are concerned please contact your general practitioner.

Serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) are very rare with immunotherapy treatment.

## Can I have immunotherapy if I am pregnant?

We would not start immunotherapy if you are trying to conceive or are already pregnant. If you become pregnant when you are established on maintenance injections, treatment can continue.

If you have any concerns, discuss them with your immunology consultant.