

Department of Dermatology, Allergy and Skin Surgery

Attending the Patch Test Clinic

Please take a few minutes to read this information sheet before attending the Patch Test Clinic.

It is necessary for you to attend the clinic on three occasions in the same week; Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and possibly the following Wednesday if required. Your appointments on Monday and Wednesday will take approximately 40 minutes, and Friday's appointment may take longer depending on your results.

Patch testing is a simple technique which will help us determine if your skin condition is caused or aggravated by allergy. The procedure is painless and involves placing a number of small chambers on your back and upper arms. The chambers contain substances to which you might be sensitive. These are held in place for 48 hours with non-allergic adhesive tape. The position of each chamber is marked with a marker pen.

If you are allergic to a tested substance, you will develop a patch of eczema under that chamber. There is an extremely low chance of making you allergic to something through the patch testing procedure.

The substances used for testing are chosen carefully and are tested at a concentration sufficient to produce an allergic reaction if it exists. Some substances can be slightly irritant or your skin may be very easily irritated. Therefore you may have some reactions which will be considered 'irritant' rather than 'allergic'. We try to avoid testing with known irritants. It is necessary to test a wide range of potential allergens in all our patients to help detect both your particular allergens and to monitor the changing levels of allergy in the population.

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If your problem is on an exposed site, such as the hands or face, it may have been caused or aggravated by sunscreens, or by cosmetics and toiletries which now often contain a sunscreen chemical. To investigate this possibility, we may also do photopatch testing as some chemicals only cause allergy after they have been exposed to sunlight. For this, one set of chemicals will have ultraviolet light shone on them on Wednesday. The amount of light is very small and on its own is unlikely to cause any reaction.

Some DOs and DON'Ts

DO stop taking antihistamine tablets or syrup, as some of the tests may not work if you are taking them. **Please stop taking antihistamines 1 WEEK BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT. If you cannot stop taking your antihistamine for any reason please still attend your appointment and inform the doctor during the consultation.** Nasal sprays for hay fever and puffers for asthma are not a problem, so please continue these medications and bring them along with you to the clinic.

DO bring along a list of any tablets you are taking or creams that have been prescribed.

DO bring anything which you think may have caused or aggravated your dermatitis, e.g. cosmetics or creams bought from the chemist or health shop, rubber gloves etc.

DO avoid sport or heavy physical work until after the second appointment, as this may dislodge the tapes.

DON'T apply moisturiser to your back on the Monday of your test.

DON'T apply steroid cream to your back and upper arms for 3 days before your patch tests.

DON'T wear your best clothes as it is necessary to mark your back with a coloured pen where the patches are placed. It is advisable to wear an old pyjama top, vest or t-shirt in bed to protect bedding, also be aware the pen could possibly mark soft furnishings or sofa upholstery.

DON'T make the appointments in the 2 weeks following a sunny holiday or using a sun bed as the tests don't work on newly sun-tanned skin.

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The Patch Test Clinic is held in the Dermatology Department at Amersham Hospital.

On **Monday**, a detailed history is taken and appropriate patch tests are applied.

On **Wednesday**, if possible please ask a family member to gently remove the patches approximately one hour before you come to the clinic. If this is not possible, we shall remove them for you in the clinic. You may have a few more patches added at this visit.

On **Friday**, you will be told if you are allergic to anything and given advice for the future.

It will not be possible to take a bath or shower until after Friday's appointment. You can, however, wash down with a flannel away from the test area.

If you have any queries about the procedure, please contact the Wilkinson Day Unit between 8.30am and 12.30pm.

Telephone no: 01494 734630.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the main entrance of the hospital and at the entrance to every clinical area before coming in to and after leaving the clinical area or hospital. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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