

Asthma & Allergy Associates PA

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Practice Limited To Asthma and Allergy by Appointment Only

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Penicillin Allergy: Are You Still Allergic and Why Is It Important?

One of the often overlooked factors contributing to antibiotic resistance is “penicillin allergy,” which is reported by about 10% of the population. This most common drug allergy is associated with a generally unrecognized morbidity; it leads to receiving alternative antibiotics when a penicillin is the drug of choice. Receiving an alternative antibiotic has been associated with higher cost, greater risk for adverse effects, longer hospital stays, and encouraging resistant bacterial strains(MRSA, *C. difficile*, vancomycin-resistant enterococcus).

Penicillin skin testing can determine whether continued avoidance of penicillin is necessary. In fact, approximately 9 in 10 individuals with suspected penicillin allergy have negative penicillin skin testing and can actually receive penicillins safely. The main reason for this observation is that penicillin allergy is often misdiagnosed and when present wanes over time in most (but not all) individuals. Allowing many people to return to using penicillin antibiotics should slow the development of antibiotic resistance, decrease hospital stays, and lower health care costs.

1. Macy E, Contreras R. Health care use and serious infection prevalence associated with penicillin “allergy” in hospitalized patients: A cohort study. *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2014; 133:790-6.
2. Solensky R. Penicillin allergy as a public health measure. *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2014; 133:797-8.
3. American Academy of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology, 2015.