

Immunotherapy treatment with Alutard SQ Wasp and Bee Venom

Information for Families

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have an allergy to bee and wasp venom. It gives information about a treatment for this type of allergy called immunotherapy and will hopefully answer some of your questions about it. It explains the benefits and risks, as well as what to expect when your child comes to hospital.

Your child should also read this leaflet if they are at an appropriate age to do so.

What is Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy (desensitisation) is a well-established treatment for certain severe allergies. It involves being given increasing doses of the allergen (substance your child is allergic to) over a prolonged period of time, to help teach their immune system to tolerate it and not 'fight' it. Wasp and bee venom immunotherapy has been shown to lower the risk of severe reactions to wasp and bee stings. It is given as a course of regular injections, under the skin, over three years.

Are there any alternative treatments?

An alternative option would be to choose not to receive the immunotherapy. You will need to keep your emergency plan, including antihistamine and self-injectable adrenaline, with you at all times in case of a bee or wasp venom sting.

What happens during treatment?

Immunotherapy injections are given on the Children's Day Care Unit on Bramble Ward at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. When you arrive at the unit, the nurse will ask for your consent. During this time, the nurse will explain the treatment plan with you and give you the opportunity to ask any questions.

The first up-dosing visit will take most of the day. The following 'up-dosing' visits (weeks 2-7) will last about half a day. Once the maintenance dose has been reached, each visit will take about 2 hours.

The allergy nurse will ask you and your child about their health and how they have been since their last injection. If they experienced any side effects after the last injection, you can discuss this with your nurse on the day of the appointment. Your child will be examined and have some basic observations recorded.

The immunotherapy injection will be placed under the skin of your child's upper arm using a very fine needle.

A very small number of people have allergic reactions to the venom. These usually happen within an hour of the injection being given. Your child will be asked to wait for 1-2 hours after the last injections so that we can monitor them and give the appropriate treatment if needed. They will need to stay on the Day Case Unit during this time. If they remain symptom free, we can safely let them go home.

How can you prepare your child for the treatment?

Your child should take a dose of long-acting antihistamine, such as cetirizine, the night before coming to their venom immunotherapy appointments and another dose on the day of the injection, at least one hour before the first injection. This will reduce potential side effects of the injections.

How is the treatment given?

The first part of treatment is an 'up-dosing' phase. Your child will need to come to our department once a week for seven weeks. Please note that although the number of injections goes down, the strength of each injection goes up. This is why we call it 'up-dosing'. The aim of this is to gradually build up your child's tolerance to the venom.

You must also check with us, your child's GP or pharmacist before they start taking anything new. Medications with large amounts of aluminium, such as antacids used for heartburn, must also be checked. Vaccines must not be given within seven days before or after an injection of immunotherapy.

Can your child stop carrying their emergency kit whilst receiving immunotherapy?

No. Your child must continue to have their emergency plan and kit (antihistamines and adrenaline auto-injector) with them at all times during the immunotherapy treatment, in case of a bee or wasp sting.

What should your child do when they get home?

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

© Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E