# Penicillin Allergy – Patient Guide for Children and Adults

**What is a penicillin allergy?**

* Drugs in the penicillin family, such as penicillin, amoxicillin, and Augmentin, are antibiotics that treat bacterial infections.
* Drugs in the penicillin family are often the best antibiotics to treat many bacterial infections.
* Some people are allergic to penicillin. Serious penicillin allergies usually happen within hours of taking the antibiotic. These include:
  + Swelling of the throat, tongue, lips, or eyes
  + Wheezing or trouble breathing
  + A raised itchy rash, known as hives
* Other very rare serious allergies can happen after you have been on antibiotics for days or weeks and include a rash that leads to peeling or blistering, sometimes so bad that you need to be hospitalized.
* Most reactions to penicillin are less serious, such as a rash that starts days or weeks after taking an antibiotic and goes away on its own.
* If you had a reaction to penicillins, avoid them until you talk to your healthcare provider. 95% of people who have a penicillin allergy listed in their chart can tolerate penicillin. Of people with true penicillin allergies, 80% of these allergies go away after 10 years.
  + If you have a serious reaction, you may need to avoid these medicines in the future.
  + If you had a more mild reaction, you can usually take these medicines again.
* Penicillin allergies are not passed down in families. Just because your parent or sibling is allergic does not mean that you are too.

**What antibiotic reactions are not allergies?**

* Some reactions to antibiotics are not allergies, but side effects like nausea or diarrhea.
* Side effects are usually not harmful and may not occur every time you take that antibiotic or a related one.
* When people take antibiotics when they don’t need them (like for a virus), they may think that they have an allergic reaction to the antibiotic when really a rash or other symptoms may be from the virus itself.

**What should you discuss with your healthcare provider?**

* Your healthcare provider will ask questions to find out whether you have a penicillin allergy, such as:
* What antibiotic were you taking when you had a reaction?
* What was the reaction?
* How long after taking the antibiotic did you have the reaction?
* What antibiotics have you taken since having the reaction?
* If your healthcare provider says you have a penicillin allergy, ask them to tell you which antibiotics you should avoid and which antibiotics are safe to take.
* If your healthcare provider says you don’t have a penicillin allergy when you thought you did, ask them to explain why. You should also ask:
* How to avoid side effects from antibiotics in the future
* If they will remove the allergy from your medical record
* If you need to tell other healthcare providers that you had a reaction to antibiotics

*This document is intended to provide health-related information so that you may be better informed. It is not a substitute for your healthcare provider's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.*

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