

## Penicillin Allergy: What you need to know

**10%**

Percentage of US population labeled with a penicillin allergy

**90%**

Percentage of those labeled who are actually not allergic

### **PENICILLIN FACTS**

- 1 **An unverified history of penicillin allergy can lead to longer hospitalizations, higher cost, greater adverse effects of alternative antibiotics, and increased rates of serious antibiotic resistance.**
- 2 **It is common for a penicillin allergy to resolve over time. In fact, 80 percent of patients with IgE mediated penicillin allergy lose their sensitivity within 10 years of their reaction.**
- 3 **Broad-spectrum antibiotics such as macrolides and fluoroquinolones are often used as alternatives to penicillins. These second line antibiotics are less effective against certain bacteria and often have more adverse side effects.**
- 4 **All forms of natural and semi-synthetic penicillin can cause an allergy. However, reaction to intravenous administration is more likely to trigger a reaction, than the drug being taken orally.**

Among the 10 percent of Americans who have a reported penicillin allergy less than 1 percent actually have an Ig-E mediated reaction to the penicillin antibiotic. In most cases they were either misdiagnosed or may have had side effects or symptoms of the underlying illness that was interpreted as an allergy.

Often during childhood, patients are treated with an antibiotic for a viral infection and subsequently develop a rash. The trigger of the rash is often hard to diagnose as being the penicillin or the actual illness. Doctors will often play it safe and label the child as allergic without verifying the cause of the rash.

In a study presented at the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology annual scientific meeting, researchers examined surveys of 276 general practitioners at Rochester Regional Health. The surveys found that while 80 percent had acknowledged a patients need for allergy consultation, they either hadn't referred the patients or had done so in

an extremely low volume. "The survey showed us there is a lack of understanding in internists and general practitioners regarding the need for testing the large number of people who report penicillin allergy but have never been tested" said Dipekka Soni, MD, lead author of the study. Before prescribing penicillin alternative antibiotics to a patient with a suspected penicillin allergy, evaluate your patient and get a detailed history of the reaction. IgE-Mediate reactions usually occur within an hour of exposure. Signs of a reaction include: hives, angioedema, wheezing, shortness of breath, and anaphylaxis. Refer the patient to an allergist who can evaluate for a penicillin allergy.



Talk to your provider or our nursing staff today if you think you may have a penicillin allergy