

Allergy Testing Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do intradermal allergy testing (skin allergy testing)?

Allergy testing will be scheduled if one of our veterinary dermatologists or your family veterinarian believes your pet has environmental allergies. The purpose of testing is to determine specific environmental allergens that your pet is reacting to in order to formulate a treatment (allergy immunotherapy/allergy shots).

2. What is involved in Intradermal allergy testing?

Intradermal allergy testing involves testing your pet to see if they are allergic to allergens in the environment. During the test small quantities of allergen extracts are injected into your pet's skin and then monitored to see whether a small "hive-like" reaction occurs at the site of injection. Your pet will be sedated for the test and a patch of hair will be shaved on their side so the reactions can be seen.

3. Will the test include food allergens?

The test does not include food allergens. Skin and blood testing for food allergies are inaccurate. We recommend completing a strict elimination diet in order to accurately determine whether a food allergy is present and which dietary items are causing allergic symptoms.

4. What allergens do we test for?

When most people say "environmental allergies", our minds jump to pollen allergies, which only occur Spring/Summer and Fall. However, in our pets we can also see allergies to mold spores (Spring "Thaw" and Fall "Leaves"; as well as year-round indoor), insects (Summer and Fall) and also indoor allergens such as dust mites, which can be present year-round. Your pet can have environmental allergies if they are itchy year round. Our allergy test looks for positive reactions to multiple types of tree pollens, grass pollens, weed pollens, mold spores, insects, dander and dust mites.

5. What do I need to know if my pet is referred for allergy skin testing?

Patients referred for intradermal skin testing will need to have the following medications withdrawn prior to testing:

- Long-acting injectable corticosteroids (Depo-medrol®) - 8-12 weeks
- Oral corticosteroids (Prednisone, dexamethasone, Vanectyl-P®) - 4 weeks
- Topical corticosteroids (including ear medications containing a steroid) - 4 weeks
- Antihistamines (Benadryl®, Reactine®, Claritin®, Hydroxyzine, etc.) - 2 weeks
- Amitriptyline (Elavil®), Fatty acids, Pentoxifylline, Cyclosporine (Atopica®) - 2 weeks

In the 2 weeks prior to allergy testing, you are able to continue the following :

- Bathing using non-steroidal shampoos & cool water up to once daily
- Antibiotics/anti-yeast medications to address bacterial/yeast infections
- Cyclosporine ONLY if the patient has never received it in the past
- Ivermectin/avermectin trials to eliminate ectoparasites

Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions about a medication your pet is currently taking.

Your pet should be fasted the morning of the allergy testing appointment with no food given after midnight the night prior.

If your pet has diabetes or another medical condition requiring specific feeding times please contact our office for advice regarding fasting.

Pets under one year of age are not routinely tested as their immune system will have been exposed to every season.

6. What can I do to keep my pet comfortable while waiting to be tested?

You can have your pet wear a T-shirt and/or bathe more frequently. Bathe with cool water to help relieve itchiness. Any secondary bacterial/yeast infections can be treated to improve your pet's comfort.

7. When will I have the results for the skin testing?

The results of the intradermal allergy testing will be available the same day as testing.

8. What happens after the test?

Allergen immunotherapy (allergy shots or allergy drops) will be formulated based on your pet's positive reactions. Typically allergy injections will be started within 2-4 weeks after testing. Approximately 70-90% of pet's respond positively within 6-12 months of starting immunotherapy.

9. Why would I do Allergen immunotherapy for my pet's allergies?

Allergen immunotherapy is the only therapy that directly addresses your pet's allergies to environmental allergens such as grasses, trees, weed pollens, molds, and house dust mites. It is the safest and most effective long-term therapy.

10. How will the allergy immunotherapy be given?

Immunotherapy can be given via an injection just under your pet's skin (subcutaneous injection) or it can be given as drops into your pet's mouth. There are differences in the schedules between the injections and the drops – these can be discussed at your appointment with the veterinary dermatologist.

11. Will my pet need to stay overnight for the testing?

Your pet will not need to stay with us overnight as long as there are no complications with the sedation. They will be able to go home after the test but may be sleepy or slightly unsteady on their feet so may require supervision for a few hours after the test.