

Does your child really have a

PENICILLIN ALLERGY?

Talk to your provider to make sure your child gets the best antibiotic for their infection.



Childhood penicillin allergy facts:

Over 95 percent of children who are labeled as penicillin allergic do not have a true penicillin allergy.

Penicillin allergies are not inherited (passed down from parent to child).

Why do inaccurate penicillin allergies matter?

We want to prescribe the best antibiotic for the infection we're treating. Penicillin and similar antibiotics often work better for certain infections such as strep throat and ear infections.

Other antibiotics might have disadvantages. Children who have a reported penicillin allergy often receive other antibiotics that cause more side effects. These alternatives can also harm more of the "good bacteria" in your child's body. Some penicillin alternatives taste bad – making it harder to get children to take them.

If it's not an allergy, what causes my child's symptoms?

Your child might have experienced side effects of penicillin or another medicine, which can be confused with an allergic reaction. A side effect is a symptom caused by the medicine, including stomachache or diarrhea.

1. Joerger T, et al. J Pediatric Infect Dis Soc. 2023 Feb 27;12(2):92-98.
2. AAAAI. Penicillin Allergy FAQ. Updated Sept 2023.
3. Khan DA, et al. J Allergy Clin Immunol. 2022 Dec;150(6):1333-1393
4. Exius R, et al. J Allergy Clin Immunol Pract. 2021 Nov;9(11):4060-4066.
5. Chow TG, et al. Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol. 2023 May;130(5):667-669.

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Your child might have had a viral infection that caused a rash. Sometimes these viral rashes are mistakenly believed to be caused by penicillin allergy.

What does a true allergy look like?

An allergic reaction is caused by the immune system's reaction to a medicine. Allergic reactions can include itchy rashes, hives, swollen lips, trouble breathing, wheezing, and anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can be life-threatening if not treated right away.

Allergies are rare. They usually happen every time you take a certain medicine. Allergic reactions occur right away or shortly after taking a medicine.

Is there a safe way to check if my child's penicillin allergy is real?

Yes. A health care provider can assess children with a suspected penicillin allergy. This involves asking questions to find out if their reaction history is consistent with allergic reactions.

Sometimes, a child needs a formal allergy evaluation. This typically involves giving the child a test dose of the antibiotic in a safe, monitored environment with supportive care nearby in case of a reaction. Test doses have been successfully given by trained health care providers to children as young as 2 years old. Most parents report satisfaction with their test dose experience and would recommend it to others.



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