

# Penicillin Allergy

## Information for Patients & Carers

### What is PENICILLIN?

Penicillin is a common antibiotic used to treat many infections, such as chest infections (pneumonia), skin infections and throat infections (tonsillitis).

It is often the treatment chosen first because it works well and is usually safe. Common examples of penicillin antibiotics include:

**Penicillin V (Phenoxymethylpenicillin), Amoxicillin, Flucloxacillin, Co-amoxiclav and Pivmecillinam.**

### What is the DIFFERENCE between a side effect and an allergy?



Penicillin allergy  
or side effect?

A **side effect** is an expected but sometimes unpleasant reaction to a medicine. Side effects can usually be managed and do not last long.

An **allergy** is an uncommon, specific and possibly serious reaction to a medicine. Symptoms can include an itchy rash that spreads quickly, swelling of the lips or mouth, or difficulty breathing, which can be fatal and a risk to life. An allergy may mean you need to stop the medicine and never take it again.

### Penicillin SIDE EFFECTS.

Most reactions to penicillin are side effects, not allergies.

Unpleasant side effects should go when the course is completed. Side effects do not mean you need to avoid penicillin antibiotics completely.

Common side effects include:

- **Mild skin reactions**
- **Vomiting or loose poo**
- **Feeling sick, headache, strange taste in mouth**
- **Not wanting to eat, feeling bloated, stomach pain or a burning feeling.**

## What is a TRUE penicillin allergy?

A **TRUE** penicillin allergy occurs when the body reacts in an unusual way to a penicillin. This can be an immediate reaction (anaphylaxis) or a reaction that develops slowly after a few hours or days of taking the penicillin.

A very serious allergic reaction often occurs within minutes of taking a penicillin, usually within an hour and can be fatal.

Symptoms include:

- **A red, swollen, itchy rash that spreads quickly over a wide area**
- **Breathing problems and wheezing**
- **Coughing, blocked nose and a tight feeling in the throat & chest**
- **Swelling around the mouth, lips, tongue, face, neck**
- **Feeling faint and collapsing**

**Call 999 for urgent medical help, if any of these symptoms occur.**

If you believe you are having an allergic reaction but have none of the symptoms listed above, stop taking the medicine and seek medical advice.

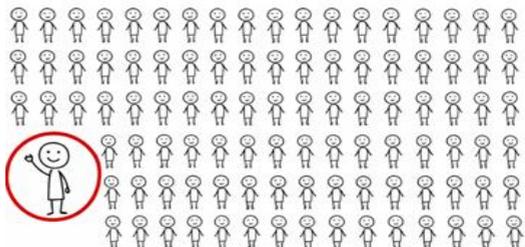
## HOW COMMON is penicillin allergy?

**Only 1 in 100 people have a genuine penicillin allergy.**

Anaphylaxis occurs in about 1 in 10,000 people taking penicillin, so it is extremely rare.

How common is penicillin allergy?

**1 in 100**



**WHY DOES IT MATTER- why do my medical records need to be correct?**



It matters because penicillin antibiotics are the best treatments for many common infections. If you can't take penicillin, there are fewer antibiotics for you to take, which may make your illness more difficult to treat.

It is very important that allergies recorded in your medical records are correct and up to date to make sure your treatment and any antibiotics prescribed for you are safe.

**What can I do to make sure MY allergy record is correct?**

Anyone can have an allergy to penicillin, but some people think they are allergic, because they had a side effect or virus as a child.

Asking about your allergy or side effects will help you to find out if you have a **TRUE allergy** and which antibiotics you can take safely.

Penicillin allergy does not run in families so if you have a close relative who has a penicillin allergy this doesn't mean that you will be allergic too.



It is important that **TRUE allergies** are recorded in your medical records. Think about medical alert devices if you have a **TRUE allergy**.

More information on antibiotic side effects is on the NHS website:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/antibiotics/side-effects/>