

Subcutaneous immunotherapy injections for allergic rhinitis and asthma



What is Immunotherapy?

Aero-allergen immunotherapy (also called desensitisation) is the regular administration of commercially prepared airborne allergens extracts (e.g. house dust mite, grass, etc) performed to reduce symptoms of hay-fever (allergic rhinitis) and/or asthma. Immunotherapy is usually given as a 3-5 year course. Subcutaneous immunotherapy (SCIT) is given as an injection into the back of the upper arm.

When is it used?

SCIT is used for:

- Allergic rhinitis and asthma: SCIT is offered when the patient's symptoms are persistent, difficult to control and affecting one's day-to-day life. It aims to reduce symptoms of allergic rhinitis and/or asthma and the need for medications. Immunotherapy is used in addition to nasal sprays and/or antihistamines, but the need for these medications should decrease as the immunotherapy takes effect.
- SCIT is available for those with bee, wasp and jack jumper ant anaphylaxis. Immunotherapy is not used in routine clinical practice for food allergy or eczema.

How often is subcutaneous immunotherapy given, and for how long?

The initial injection is given at the Royal Children's Hospital (this is usually given as single injection). If you require two different allergen injections (e.g. one for dust and one for grass), the injections will be given half an hour apart. After the last injection, your child will be observed for a minimum of 30 minutes.

When will I see an improvement?

An improvement is usually seen within 12 months of commencing immunotherapy.

Are there any side effects from the subcutaneous injections?

The possible side effects from the injections are:

- Sore arm and/or swelling at the injection site
- Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) (~1% risk per injection)
- Severe life threatening allergic reaction (1 in 2 million people)
- Small, itchy lumps under the skin where the injection is given (this very rare and the lumps are hard; speak to your Allergists if this occurs)

What happens at each visit for the subcutaneous injections?

Your child will then be assessed by a nurse and their vital signs recorded.

Your child needs to be well on the day of immunotherapy.

We request following the injection that your child does not participate in any physical exercise (including sport or sports training) on the afternoon and evening after their immunotherapy injection (as this can increase the chances of an allergic reaction). Please continue all your child's regular medications (including nasal sprays and asthma medications) on the immunotherapy days. Please make sure that your Allergist knows all the medications that your child is taking.

What happens when my child is having subcutaneous injections at the GP?

Your GP (or Practice Nurse) will administer the subcutaneous injection/s. It is important that your child is observed for 30 minutes after the last injection to monitor for the rare occurrence of a severe allergic reaction.

After the first injection at the hospital, we ask your GP to perform the injections at their practice. Your child's immunotherapy extracts must be stored at your GP's in the fridge. We will provide your GP with full instructions regarding your child's immunotherapy (i.e when to give, how much to give, etc).

What is the cost of the immunotherapy extracts (as of Nov 2017)?

The immunotherapy brand for injections is called Alxoid (distributed by AMSL). Immunotherapy is not on the PBS and there is an out of pocket cost that the company will charge you. Per month, per allergen, the cost is approximately \$52 per month (for one year, for one allergen, the cost is \$624; if your child requires two different allergens, e.g. one for dust and one for grass, then the total yearly cost is \$1248. Some private health insurance funds provide a small rebate for immunotherapy extracts. You will need to check with your individual fund.

What do I do if I want to go ahead with immunotherapy?

If you wish to go ahead with the immunotherapy injections, it is important that:

- You inform the allergist you are seeing you wish to proceed with the injections
- The Allergist will provide you with the order form (which we will photocopy without your credit card details for our records)
- You will need to fill in the credit card details on this form and you will need to send the form to the company (either via fax or scan and email the form, as per the numbers provided on the form).



- We recommend you ring the company to ensure they have received your order. You will not be charged until the allergen extracts arrive in Australia.
- Once the extracts have arrived to the Royal Children's Hospital (which usually takes 10 weeks from the time you have placed the order), our staff will contact you to book an appointment to perform the first injection.

Once you start immunotherapy, one of our nurses will contact you by telephone 3 months after initiation for a phone review. You will then have a yearly review back at the Royal Children's Hospital. If you have any further questions, please contact the Department of Allergy on (03) 9345 4331