Local anaesthetic testing

This leaflet will answer some of the questions you may have about having a local anaesthetic allergy test. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives to the procedure, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor, dentist or nurse caring for you.

What is local anaesthetic testing?
Your doctor or dentist has referred you to the Department of Oral Medicine for local anaesthetic testing due to a suspected allergic reaction to local anaesthetic. This test involves exposing you to different types of local anaesthetic, to see if you have a reaction, letting us identify any you are allergic to.

Why should I have local anaesthetic testing?
This procedure is done to confirm whether or not you are allergic to particular local anaesthetics. This will help us to avoid allergic reactions in the future and to find at least one local anaesthetic that you can tolerate. This can then be used in future when you need a local anaesthetic for dental treatment.

What are the risks?
There is a risk that you might have a minor local reaction, but the tests are designed to minimise this. If you develop a rash or swelling, you will be given the necessary treatment immediately to reduce any symptoms. You will not be sent home until your symptoms have improved.

You may feel drowsy or tired the day after the tests, as some people feel this way after a local anaesthetic.

Are there any other alternatives?
Performing the local anaesthetic testing is the only way to investigate whether you are allergic to any local anaesthetics.

How can I prepare for local anaesthetic testing?
We would advise you to attend your test with a responsible adult, particularly if you have had a previous bad reaction to local anaesthetics.

We would prefer that you bring someone with you to keep you company all afternoon while the tests are being done, and to accompany you home in case you feel drowsy. Most people do not feel drowsy on the way home.

You may wish to set aside the whole afternoon for the procedure, and you may not be allowed to go home until after 5pm.
Asking for your consent
We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If there is anything you don’t understand or you need more time to think about it, please tell the staff caring for you.

Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time. Let staff know immediately if you change your mind. Your wishes will be respected at all times.

What happens during the local anaesthetic testing?
It involves three stages. Stage 1 is scratching your forearm with a needle carrying a range of local anaesthetics. Stage 2 is injecting a small amount of the agent under your skin. Stage 3 is injecting a small amount of local anaesthetic into your cheek from inside your mouth.

After each substance is tested you will be observed for 15-30 minutes to see if you show any adverse (unwanted) reactions. After having a negative skin test, one local anaesthetic will be chosen to be tested at stage 3. After having the skin tests, one of the local anaesthetics that did not show an unwanted reaction will be chosen to test. We will give you a small test dose (in the mouth) to reassure you, and others wanting to give you a local anaesthetic in the future, that you can tolerate at least one local anesthetic. It is very likely that there will be at least one local anaesthetic that can be used for the stage 3 test. If no safe local anaesthetic is indentified, we will explain to you what happens next.

Will I feel any pain?
You may feel a little discomfort when the local anaesthetic is injected under your skin and when injected into your cheek.

What happens after the procedure?
You will be observed to see if you show any adverse reactions. You will be able to go home 45-60 minutes after your last injection.

What do I need to do after I go home?
After the procedure you will be able to return home or go back to work as normal, unless you show any adverse reactions as a result of the test. If you have a rash, you will not be allowed to go home until it starts to go away.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?
You will not normally need a follow-up appointment at Guy’s Hospital unless you were referred from a department there. Your next appointment will most likely be with your own dentist.

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about local anaesthetic testing, please contact the Oral Medicine Department, t: 020 7188 4399, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets