

Penicillin Allergies and Surgery

This document is for people who have or think they may have a penicillin allergy and are having surgery.

The only people who should avoid all penicillin family antibiotics are those who have very rare, serious reactions. These reactions are different from the usual ones like rash, throat swelling and hives.

Penicillins are very important drugs. They are often the best drug to treat infections when we get sick. They are also used to prevent infections after surgery. If your doctor can't use penicillin, they may have to use a different antibiotic. These don't always work as well and they can have more dangerous side effects.

Do I have a penicillin allergy?

Many people who have been told they have a penicillin allergy may not actually be allergic. There are several reasons for this.

- Penicillin is made using molds (fungus). In the past, many people who thought they were allergic did not actually have a penicillin allergy. They were reacting to the mold left in the mixture. Newer versions of penicillin are more pure and less likely to cause an allergic reaction.
- An allergic reaction to one type of penicillin does not always mean an allergy to all types.
- Allergies to penicillin tend to disappear within 10 years.
- Rashes from a viral infection may be confused with a penicillin allergy rash.

Penicillins and surgery

- The only people who should avoid all penicillin family antibiotics are those with rare, serious reactions that cause patients to lose their skin or have organ failure. These reactions are different than the usual ones like rash, throat swelling and hives.
- Before your surgery the team reviews your chart. We ask you about this allergy if it is noted.
- Most people will receive an antibiotic related to penicillin. This antibiotic is safe in almost all people who are allergic to penicillin. It lowers your risk of an infection after surgery.
- If you have had a serious reaction in the past, we give you a different antibiotic.
- Speak to the surgeon or the anaesthesiologist if you have any questions or concerns about your allergy.



This material has been reviewed and approved by patients, families and staff.

