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Wasp and Bee Venom Immunotherapy
Immunotherapy Department
Patient Information Leaflet

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**Wasp and Bee Venom Immunotherapy**

**Introduction**

Bee and wasp venom allergy is one of the major causes of severe allergic reactions in the UK. Severe allergic reactions to stings can be rapid in onset and occasionally life-threatening and therefore, requiring immediate treatment. Immediate treatment for acute severe, systemic reactions includes self-administration of the adrenaline auto-injector (Epipen/Jext) and anti-histamines (as discussed in the allergy clinic).

**What is specific immunotherapy?**

Specific Immunotherapy or desensitisation is a treatment in which increasing doses of the specific venom (wasp or bee venom) are given in order to promote and improve the body's tolerance to the venom. Promoting the body's tolerance should help to reduce the risk to severe systemic reactions to future stings.

Venom Immunotherapy is the only specific and potentially 'curative' treatment that is currently available to a carefully selected group of patients with wasp or bee venom allergy.

**What does the treatment involve?**

Carefully calculated amounts of venom are given by injection into your arm.
Initially we build up your tolerance by giving gradually increasing amounts of venom at weekly intervals over a period of three months (Induction phase). Thereafter, we will give you a maintenance dose once every 4-8 weeks for till the end of the course (usually 3-5 years). This phase of treatment is called the 'maintenance phase'.

What happens at each visit?

At each visit the doctor/nurse records your baseline measurements (pulse/blood pressure) and records any symptoms/illness that you may have had since the previous injection. After the injection you must remain in the clinic area for at least 60 minutes. If you feel unwell after the injection then you may be asked to stay a little longer until the doctor is happy for you to leave.

Are there any adverse reactions/unwanted effects to the treatment?

Local redness, itching and sometimes swelling may occur at the site of injection. These usually settle without any treatment or with an antihistamine tablet, but if you are concerned, please do not hesitate to discuss with the doctor/nurse. Local reactions are not a reason to discontinue immunotherapy, but may sometimes need adjustments to be made to the dosage. Taking an antihistamine tablet 1-2 hours before the injection often reduces local reactions.
Serious reactions to immunotherapy are very rare. In the rare cases, severe reactions have usually occurred within 30 minutes after the injections and often in patients with other underlying medical problems. This is why it is recommended that you stay in the clinic area for at least 60 minutes after each injection. The doctors and nurses in clinic are experienced in treating this sort of reaction if required.

Some patients may experience minor delayed symptoms (6-24 hours after injection). These are usually minor and settle with paracetamol and antihistamine tablet. However, you should seek medical help, if they are troublesome. Please mention any delayed symptoms to the doctor/nurse prior to next injection.

**Is there anything that I should not do after the injection?**

You must avoid any form of strenuous physical activity and prolonged hot water bathing for at least 24 hours after the injection. These activities are said to increase the risk of delayed reactions.

**What about any other medications that I am taking?**

This would have been discussed with you prior to starting immunotherapy. However, if you have a new illness or have been asked to start any new treatment during the course of immunotherapy, then please inform the doctor/nurse prior to the next injection. Immunotherapy injections are not recommended during acute illness/infections. Immunotherapy injections should not be given at the same time as other vaccines (for example: travel vaccines). We would recommend at least 2 weeks between immunotherapy and vaccination. Please discuss this during your clinic appointment.

**What if I miss an appointment?**

It is important to attend the clinic every week for the first 12 weeks (induction phase). Please factor this into your personal/professional diaries prior to starting treatment. If you really cannot attend and have to rearrange an appointment, then please inform the clinic as soon as possible. The dosage and schedule of the injections will have to be readjusted. An interval of greater than 3 weeks in this phase may mean re-starting the whole treatment.

During the maintenance phase, rearranging the appointment by 1-2 weeks may not affect the schedule/dosage. Please discuss with the doctor/nurse in clinic, if you are more than 4 weeks late for your injection. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please telephone and rearrange as soon as possible.

**Can I have this treatment if I am pregnant?**

Immunotherapy is not started if you are already pregnant or planning to conceive. However, if you become pregnant whilst you are already well-established on the maintenance phase (4-8 weekly injections) and have had no significant problems, then we will