Desensitisation for bee and wasp stings

Introduction
This leaflet provides information on your treatment for bee and wasp stings.

What is desensitisation?
De-sensitisation is a treatment for preventing severe allergic reactions. It involves weekly injections for 10 to 12 weeks and then monthly injections for 3 years. It is effective in 70% of cases.

Before you start your treatment
Before you start your desensitisation, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You may be asked to take an oral antihistamine before you come into the unit (if you have a history of local reactions).

Are there any side effects?
Severe adverse reactions are uncommon, but usually occur within an hour after your injection. A doctor or nurse will be present during your treatment and you will be carefully observed for 1 hour. Fatal reactions have been reported, but are very rare. Desensitisation can only be carried out in specialised clinics. Treatment is carried out in line with the recent document by the Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology. At Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, we have had no fatal reactions.
Adverse reactions are greatly reduced by careful patient selection and good clinical practice. The possible side effects of desensitisation are as follows:

**Mild general reactions**
- The injection site may itch slightly
- Local ‘flare and wheal’ (raised lump with a red area around it)
- Local swelling.

**Moderate general reactions**
Intense itching
- Erythema (redness of the skin)
- Rhinitis (runny nose)
- Angioedema (swelling of the face and lips).

**Severe general reactions**
- Difficulty in breathing (wheezing)
- Anaphylactic shock causes severe drop in blood pressure and collapse.

Emergency treatment may require the administration of adrenaline. Mild and moderate reactions can be easily treated. However, if you have repeated allergic reactions, or a severe reaction, it may not be possible to continue your treatment.

**Starting your injections**
- You will be given a date and time to attend the Edward Jenner Unit at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
- Treatment should not be performed if some types of heart medication are being taken, for example betablockers.

Please check with your doctor or nurse.
Before your injection, you must report any of the following:

- Infections, such as coughs or colds
- Any deterioration in asthma or the presence of a wheeze or bad cough
- Any other illnesses
- Any change in medication
- Any late reactions to desensitisation after your last visit, for example arm swelling
- Any vaccination carried out within the last 7 days.

You will have basic observations, such as blood pressure, taken before and after your treatment. You will also be asked to perform a peak flow (measurement of lung capacity). If your peak flow reading is well below your normal level, your treatment may be delayed. Your desensitisation injection is given by deep subcutaneous (below the layers of skin) injection in the upper outer part of your arm.

What happens after my injection?

- You must stay in the unit for 1 hour after your injection, as allergic reactions may occur within this time
- Report to the nurses any wheeze, cough, shortness of breath, rash or giddiness
- Superficial wheal and flare can occur at site of injection (redness and swelling)
- In the event of a mild allergic reaction you will be prescribed oral antihistamines.

What should I do if I have a delayed reaction when I get home?

If the reaction is a red itchy rash take one antihistamine tablet. If you have a more severe reaction, ring your GP for advice. Remember to carry your Epi-Pen with you at all times, if you have been prescribed one. Be aware of the expiry date. Repeat prescriptions for your Epi-Pen should be obtained from your GP. Please refer to your leaflet on Epi-pen usage.
Contact information

The Edward Jenner Unit
Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 5213
Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm

Further information

British Allergy Foundation
Tel: 01322 619 898
Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 9:00 pm
Saturday to Sunday, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
Website: www.allergyfoundation.com
E-mail: info@allergyuk.org