



UW Veterinary Care
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ALLERGY TESTING

FOR YOUR PET

Why is allergy testing being considered?

Many times, severe skin itching and inflammation is caused by allergies to fleas, foods, or environmental substances. If we can determine exactly what your pet is allergic to, it will allow us to provide more effective treatment. For pollen, dust, and mold allergies, it allows for the possibility of treatment with “allergy shots” or “allergy drops” (also called immunotherapy or desensitization) which help to decrease the immune system’s overactive response to these substances.

What types of allergy tests are available?

Allergy testing is done either with a blood test, or with intradermal testing (sometimes also called ‘skin testing’). For many patients, we perform both tests.

What is involved in an intradermal test?

Under mild sedation, we clip the hair from the side of the chest. About 60 small injections are given just under the skin of this area, like a “TB test.” If the pet is allergic, a ‘hive’ forms at the site of one or more injections. This type of testing is more traditional, more involved, and more expensive than blood testing, but is somewhat more sensitive and has very few false positive reactions.

What is involved in an allergy blood test?

We simply take a blood sample, and the laboratory report comes back in two to three weeks. This type of testing is less expensive, but requires more careful interpretation than skin testing. In addition, we believe that certain laboratories do a better job of blood allergy testing than others.

Which allergy test is best?

Neither skin testing nor blood testing is consistently better. For many of our patients, we could do either a skin test or a blood test and the results would be comparable. For some patients, either the blood test or the skin test turns out to be more revealing, but unfortunately, we cannot know in advance which one will be best for each patient. We often need to do both tests to get the most information about a pet’s allergic sensitivities. Overall, we are able to pinpoint the allergy in about 75% of dogs and cats. It is important to understand that no allergy test is perfect, and that some pets, even those with severe itchiness, are negative on these tests.

What kinds of things will you test for?

We test for allergy to tree, weed, and grass pollens, dust components, mold spores, and fleas. These are the major allergies of dogs and cats and create 99% of allergy problems. Sometimes, we will test for uncommon things like allergy to cats, humans, or insects. Allergy tests are available for foods as well, but such testing is unreliable. We do not believe in the accuracy of food allergy tests for animals, and we do not recommend them. If food allergies are suspected, the best ‘test’ is to feed your pet a controlled diet for several months, and this may be discussed with you.

What is the cost of allergy testing?

It depends on exactly what is done and if blood testing, skin testing, or both are done. The cost for the testing alone ranges from \$275 to \$350. Added to this would be the cost of the office visits, medications, and any additional tests that would be recommended prior to or along with allergy testing. These costs will be discussed with you at the time of your visit.

How do I prepare my pet for testing?

Certain medications interfere with testing. If you have any doubts about any medication your pet takes, please call the Dermatology/Allergy Clinic. A partial list of medications that must be avoided includes the following:

- » Cortisone-type pills (steroids, itch pills, prednisone, Vetalog, Temaril-P, etc.) – must be stopped at least two to four weeks before testing.
- » Cortisone-type lotions, ointments, sprays, ear drops, or eye drops (Panolog, Tresaderm, hydrocortisone, Cortaid, Genesis, and many others) – some of these must be stopped at least two weeks before testing; please call if you are uncertain.
- » Antihistamine pills (Benadryl, diphenhydramine, chlorpheniramine, hydroxyzine, Atarax, Claritin, Zyrtec, Allegra, clemastine, and many others) – must be stopped at least seven days before testing.

Medications that are OK to give along with testing:

- » Heartworm pills, antibiotics, seizure medications, thyroid pills, flea control products, cyclosporine (Atopica), Cytopoint, or Apoquel. When in doubt, ask your veterinarian!

Please do not give your pet any food after 10:00 p.m. on the night before testing. Water is fine and can be given up until the time of the appointment.

CALL US 24/7

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