

Penicillin Allergy



What Is a Penicillin Allergy?

- Penicillin and drugs like it, such as amoxicillin and amoxicillin-clavulanate (Augmentin®), are antibiotics that treat bacterial infections.
- Drugs in the penicillin family are often the best antibiotics to treat many bacterial infections.
- Serious penicillin allergies usually happen within hours of taking the antibiotic. These include:
 - Swelling of the throat, tongue, lips, or eyes
 - Wheezing or trouble breathing
 - A raised itchy rash, known as hives
- Most reactions to penicillin are less serious, such as a rash that starts days or weeks after taking an antibiotic and goes away on its own.
- Over time, most penicillin allergies go away. Ninety-five percent of people who think they have a penicillin allergy can take penicillin. If you had a reaction to penicillins, avoid them until you talk to your clinician.
 - If you have a serious reaction, you may still need to avoid these medicines in the future.
 - If you had a milder reaction, you can usually take penicillins in the future.
- Penicillin allergies are not passed down in families. Just because your parent or sibling is allergic does not mean that you are, too.

What Antibiotic Reactions Are Not Allergic?

- Some reactions to antibiotics are not allergies, but side effects like nausea or diarrhea.
- Side effects are usually not harmful and can be treated.
- When people take antibiotics when they don't need them (like for a virus), they may think that they have an allergic reaction to the antibiotic when really a rash or other symptoms may be from the virus itself.

What Should You Discuss With Your Clinician?

- If your symptoms are not improving by day 3, or if at any time you experience any of the following, seek immediate in-person care, preferably in an emergency department:
 - The redness or swelling is rapidly spreading
 - Blisters or black/dark skin areas are forming
 - You have a high fever, chills, or feel more ill
 - The area becomes extremely painful or you are unable to use the affected limb
 - You feel confused or have trouble eating or drinking
- Your clinician will ask questions to find out whether you have a penicillin allergy, such as:
 - What antibiotic were you taking when you had a reaction?
 - What was the reaction?
 - How long after taking the antibiotic did you have the reaction?
 - What antibiotics have you taken since having the reaction?
- If your clinician says you have a penicillin allergy, ask them to tell you which antibiotics you should avoid and which antibiotics are safe to take.
- If your clinician says you don't have a penicillin allergy, you should ask:
 - How to avoid side effects from antibiotics in the future
 - If they will remove the allergy from your medical record
 - What you should tell other clinicians

AHRQ Pub. No. 26(27)-0021
October 2026

Directions for Adding Your Logo to Your Document

If you choose to add a logo to this document, you can place it in the header or footer. Below are instructions for adding a logo using Adobe Acrobat Pro. You may also use a comparable PDF editing software.

Steps:

1. Open the PDF in your Adobe PDF editing program.
2. Click on the Tools menu at the top.
3. Select "Edit PDF" from the screen.
4. Select the "Add Image" button from the top.
5. Navigate on your computer to where your logo is saved. Click Open.
6. Click on the PDF where you want the logo to appear. If needed, move the logo by clicking and dragging it to the correct location.
7. Resize the logo to fit with your document.
8. Click the save icon (at the top), or go to File menu and select Save. Make sure to save with a new name.

AHRQ Pub. No. 26(27)-0021
October 2026