



Antibiotic Stewardship: The Need for Penicillin Allergy Testing

REQUEST

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology (AAAAI) urges Congress to promote comprehensive antibiotic stewardship programs that include penicillin allergy testing, when appropriate. Specifically, **AAAAI requests senators to support the following request for report language to accompany the FY2020 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS) Appropriations:**

*“**Penicillin Allergy.** -- The Committee recognizes that about 10 percent of the U.S. population reports a history of penicillin allergy, yet studies show that approximately 90 percent or more of these patients are not allergic to penicillin and are able to take these antibiotics safely. To complement ongoing efforts to combat antimicrobial resistance, Congress believes it is prudent for the Secretary of Health and Human Services to educate the public and health care providers regarding the importance of penicillin allergy testing.”*

BACKGROUND

Comprehensive antibiotic stewardship programs should include penicillin allergy testing to determine whether penicillin is appropriate for a patient before prescribing a more expensive or newer antibiotic. Appropriate use of antibiotics is critical to slow the growth of resistance. An allergist/immunologist can help guide appropriate antibiotic use by testing patients for potential penicillin allergies and ensuring that patients with allergies to medications receive the most appropriate antibiotic.

The growing threat of antimicrobial resistance, combined with the dwindling pipeline of novel antibiotic research, requires policies that prevent inappropriate use of antibiotics. As part of the American Board of Internal Medicine Choosing Wisely® program, AAAAI recommended in 2014 that physicians should not over-use non-beta-lactam antibiotics in patients with a history of penicillin allergy without an appropriate evaluation. Antibiotic stewardship programs should examine whether penicillin is appropriate for a patient before prescribing a more expensive or newer antibiotic. **While about 10 percent of the population reports a history of penicillin allergy, studies show that approximately 90 percent or more of these patients are not allergic to penicillin and are able to take penicillin safely.** Penicillin allergy testing is safe and effective and can be performed even in critically ill patients and pregnant women. According to published research, an unverified history of penicillin allergy can contribute to higher health care costs, greater risk for adverse effects of alternative antibiotics, and increased rates of serious antibiotic resistant infections such as methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). People who require penicillin or a penicillin-like drug but have a penicillin allergy that has been verified through skin testing can be offered penicillin desensitization if there is no equally effective alternative antibiotic.

CONTACT

For additional information or if you have any questions, please contact Sheila C. Heitzig, JD, MNM CAE, AAAAI's Director of Practice & Policy at 414-272-6071 or sheitzig@aaaai.org.