

What Does The Allergist Do?

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What is an allergist/immunologist?

An allergist/immunologist is a medical doctor with specialty training in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of allergic diseases, asthma and diseases of the immune system. To become an allergist, a person must attend medical school (6 years), and undergo residency training in either internal medicine or pediatrics (3 years each). Once board-certified, the internist or pediatrician may decide to obtain additional specialty training in allergy and immunology, called a fellowship (2 years). An allergist/immunologist who is board-certified has also passed an additional examination showing competence in the fields of allergy and immunology.

What types of patients do allergists/immunologists see?

An allergist/immunologist specializes in the management of allergic and immunologic diseases. This includes the accurate diagnosis, assist in treatment and education for prevention of [allergic rhinitis](#), [asthma](#), allergic eye diseases, [atopic dermatitis](#) (eczema), [urticaria](#) (hives), [food allergy](#), [medication allergy](#), bee sting (venom) allergy, latex allergy, chronic cough, chronic sinus infections, frequent colds/bronchitis and immune problems.

Usually a primary care physician refers a patient to see an allergist, although some patients will be sent to an allergist from another specialist, such as an internal medicine, a dermatologist, an otolaryngologist, a pulmonologist or a rheumatologist.

Why should I see an allergist/immunologist?

An allergist/immunologist can provide expert medical advice and treatment in the evaluation and management of patients with allergic diseases, asthma and immune problems. This includes the ability to:

- 1- Perform and interpret allergy testing (blood and skin) for allergen identification
- 2- Expertise in treating complex allergic diseases and asthma
- 3- Allergen avoidance education (Environmental therapy)
- 4- Prescribe allergy vaccine ([allergen immunotherapy](#)).

When should an internist think to refer a patient to an allergist/immunologist?

The following is a list of reasons which may warrant an evaluation by an allergist:

1. Asthma that is not controlled and causes frequent symptoms, affects school/work/sleep/exercise, or leads to frequent doctor or emergency room visits or hospitalization.
2. Frequent allergic rhinitis symptoms that affect a person's lifestyle or lead to recurrent sinus infections.
3. Medications are not helpful in treating allergic rhinitis or asthma, or cause unwanted side effects.
4. Frequent or recurrent skin rashes, especially those that itch or may be related to allergies.
5. Any food allergy, mild or severe.
6. Any severe reaction to a bee sting, ant bite or sting, or mosquito bite.
7. Uncontrolled urticaria or recurrent swellings (angioedema).
8. Patients with moderate to severe atopic dermatitis.
9. Allergic reactions to medications for identification or desensitization.
10. The desire to reduce the need for medications and improve allergic rhinitis, conjunctivitis or asthma through treatment with allergy vaccine (immunotherapy).