

Pharmalgen for the treatment of bee and wasp venom allergy

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when **Pharmalgen** should be used to treat people with bee or wasp venom allergy in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with bee or wasp venom allergy but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe bee or wasp venom allergy or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on page 4.

This may not be the only possible treatment for bee and wasp venom allergy. Your specialist should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

NICE recommends Pharmalgen as a possible treatment for some people with bee or wasp venom allergy (see below).

Who can have Pharmalgen?

You should be able to have Pharmalgen if:

- you have had a severe reaction to a bee or wasp sting, or
- you have had a moderate reaction to a bee or wasp sting and you have one or more of the following: a high risk of stings, anxiety about stings, raised levels of a protein called 'tryptase' in your blood.

Why has NICE said this?

NICE looks at how well treatments work, and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS. NICE recommended Pharmalgen because, although it costs more than other treatments, this was justified by the benefits it provided.

Bee and wasp venom allergy

Some people are allergic to the venom in bee or wasp stings. These people may have wheezing, abdominal pains, sickness, dizziness and faintness after a sting. A few people have very severe reactions and need emergency medical treatment. People who are allergic to bees or wasps are often worried about future stings.

Pharmalgen

Pharmalgen contains bee or wasp venom. During the initial treatment increasing amounts of Pharmalgen are injected under the skin over a few hours or days. After this, Pharmalgen is given every 4 to 6 weeks for at least 3 years. Treatment with Pharmalgen reduces the sensitivity to bee or wasp venom and the rate and severity of allergic reactions to future bee and wasp stings.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have bee or wasp venom allergy, and you and your specialist think that Pharmalgen is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' on page 2), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Treatment should be given in a specialist centre experienced in venom immunotherapy. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with bee or wasp venom allergy. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Anaphylaxis Campaign, 01252 542029
www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA246

The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.

We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about bee and wasp venom allergy.

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