



# Allergy and Immunology

## PET ALLERGY

### What is pet allergy?

Pet allergy occurs when a child develops IGE allergy antibodies to proteins (allergens) from the pet. These antibodies can then react with the proteins to give symptoms commonly in the eyes, nose and breathing passages.

### What are the symptoms of pet allergy?

Common symptoms are itchy eyes, sneezing, itchy nose and sometimes wheezing or asthma attacks. Hives can occur where the pet has licked the child.

### What pets are usually involved?

The commonest allergies are to cats and dogs.

### Where do the allergens come from?

All breeds of cat and dog can potentially cause allergies, although some may not shed as much hair and skin particles (and therefore allergen) as others.

### Cat

Cat allergens are found in the saliva and on the fur. Cats lick themselves and spread the allergens, which are sticky and attach to dust particles, clothing, carpets and bedding in all parts of the home. Even after removal of the cat, cat allergens can remain in the home for up to 6 months and in the cat's bedding for up to 4 years!

### Dog

In dogs the main source of allergen is saliva, and this is spread on dander (shed skin particles) and hair.

### Other animals

Although not as common as cat and dog allergy, allergy to other animals including horses, mice, rats, rabbits, guinea pigs and birds occurs.

### Do allergy tests help?

For many (but not all) pet allergic children symptoms occur quickly after exposure to the pet. If your child has symptoms suggestive of allergy to pets your doctor can confirm the presence of allergy antibodies using allergy skin prick tests or blood test.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

- If your child has an allergic tendency do not bring a furred pet into the home
- If symptoms are severe find an existing pet a new home and remove its bedding from the home
- Do not smoke - exposure to environmental smoke worsens allergic symptoms, and makes a number of allergies including pet allergy more likely to develop