



## WHO GETS IT?

Allergic disease is a major problem in western countries where rates have been rising dramatically since the mid-20th century.

Australia has one of the highest allergy prevalence rates in the world. Up to 40 per cent of Australian children have evidence of allergic sensitisation and may go on to develop allergic diseases such as food allergies, eczema, asthma and allergic rhinitis.

\* Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014 data

# Allergies in children & adolescents



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## ALLERGIES IN AUSTRALIA

Almost four million Australians report avoiding a food type because of allergy or intolerance.

This includes 560,000 children aged between two and 18 years.

Girls are more likely than boys to be susceptible, especially to gluten and dairy allergies. However, about 71,000 boys report having an allergy or intolerance to peanuts, compared with only 39,000 girls.

The most common allergic conditions in children and adolescents are eczema (dermatitis), asthma, hay fever (rhinitis), food, drug and insect allergies.

The most common allergic foods are peanuts, tree nuts, milk, egg, wheat, soy, fish and shellfish.

Almost one in 10 Australian children are allergic to eggs, amongst the highest egg allergy rates in the world.

## WHAT IS AN ALLERGY?

An allergy is an immune system response to a substance (allergen) in the environment that the body mistakenly perceives is harmful. This causes the immune system to release massive amounts of chemicals, triggering symptoms.

Allergic reactions range from mild to severe. Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction.

## SYMPTOMS CAN INCLUDE:

- Swelling of tongue, throat, face, lips and/or eyes
- Hives or welts on the skin
- Abdominal pain, vomiting
- Difficult or noisy breathing
- Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Persistent dizziness and/or collapse
- Sudden drop in blood pressure

## HOW IS AN ALLERGY DIAGNOSED?

Allergy testing is an important part of your child's allergy assessment. It is commonly performed on individuals who have asthma, hay fever, insect sting allergies or food reactions. The main types of allergy tests are skin prick tests and blood tests.

### Skin Prick Tests

A small droplet of allergen extract (protein) is placed onto the skin (usually the forearm or shin of child), and a tiny "prick" is made through the skin using a small needle (lancet) through the drop.

If the test is positive, a wheal or swelling will appear at the site of the prick. The wheal is then measured after 15 to 20 minutes.

At the Woolcock clinic, we use a needleless system where the allergen droplet and prick is administered simultaneously. This technique is quicker and results in less discomfort compared with the traditional method.

As allergies are complex and vary from child to child, we do not perform standard "panels" of allergy tests.

Instead, a thorough history and examination is obtained before individualised skin prick testing to specific allergens (where necessary) is performed on each child.

Your doctor will then explain to you the test result and the implications of this test result. Each patient receives a printed report of the allergy test to keep as a personal record.

### Allergy Blood Tests

Blood tests are also used to evaluate a food allergy.

If a patient is allergic to a specific food, Immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies are formed to these specific allergens, which can be measured with a blood test.

These tests are now referred to as Serum Specific IgE tests.

## HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

If you are concerned about your child's allergies, speak to your doctor who will be able to refer you to our clinic.

We can make an appointment for your child to see our paediatric allergist and immunologist who specialises in children with allergies aged 0 - 18 years.

We are committed to not only help families wanting to avoid allergies developing but those looking for diagnosis and quality treatment.

After careful and thorough assessment and diagnosis, we will make an individualised treatment and management plan to suit your child's needs.

The Woolcock Institute of Medical Research is a not-for-profit organisation.

If you are interested in further information about becoming involved in our research studies or donations, please visit our website [www.woolcock.org.au](http://www.woolcock.org.au).

Your contribution will make a difference.  
Thank you for your support.

