

## What can I do if my child has a reaction?

If your child develops an allergic reaction to animals, they should first wash their face and hands with water. An antihistamine and their rescue inhaler can then be given if they have asthma.

Children with pet allergy may need to take regular antihistamines to control their symptoms. If they know that they are going to be in unavoidable contact with animals they should take antihistamine before leaving home.

### Severe symptoms are:

- Difficulty breathing (wheezing, noisy breathing, blue colour)
- Swelling in the throat (noisy breathing, drooling)
- Feeling faint or dizzy, looking very pale (lie the child down with their legs raised).

**If any of these severe symptoms occur get help straight away and dial 999 stating “anaphylaxis” (ana-fil-ak-sis).**

### Who needs to know about this allergy?

It is important to inform the nursery/school and any after school clubs. Friends and family such as grandparents will also need to know.

### Will my child outgrow these allergies.

Children do not tend to grow out of animal allergy but their symptoms may vary over time. Those children with pet allergies should be advised to avoid jobs involving contact with animals.

### Contact details?

#### References:

Ojwang V *et al.* Early exposure to cats, dogs and farm animals. . . *Pediatr Allergy Immunol*, 2020.  
Hesselmar B *et al.* Pet-keeping in early life reduces the risk of allergy. . . *PLoS One*, 2018.



North West Paediatric Allergy Network

# Pet Allergy

## Information for parents and carers

[www.allergynorthwest.nhs.uk](http://www.allergynorthwest.nhs.uk)



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Pet Allergy information - North West Paediatric Allergy Implementation Group  
This information should be used in conjunction with advice from a medical professional

## What is Pet Allergy?

Pet allergy is an allergic reaction to saliva, skin, or urine of animals. Any animal fur or feather can cause pet allergy. Pet hair can also carry other airborne allergens such as pollens, house dust mite and mould.

Cat and dog allergy are the most common. Other small animals that cause allergies include rabbits, guinea pigs, gerbils, hamsters, mice, rats, and horses. Children can also be allergic to pet birds.

Allergy is rarely caused by animals that do not have fur or feathers, such as fish, insects, or reptiles.

## What are the symptoms of pet allergy?

- Skin: Hives and worsening eczema.
- Lungs: Worsening asthma (wheezing, difficulty breathing). Exposure to birds can cause a troublesome persistent cough. An example is bird fanciers lung.
- Nose and eyes: Hay fever symptoms of sneezing, runny nose and itchy, puffy eyes are common. Some children will have these symptoms all the time.

## How serious is pet allergy?

Severe reactions (anaphylaxis) are unusual.

## How do we diagnose pet allergy?

The diagnosis of pet allergy is usually noted after a history of allergy symptoms when the child is near animals, pet owners or their clothing.

Positive allergy tests including skin prick or blood allergy antibody (IgE) tests support the diagnosis of a pet allergy but should not be used alone as children can have positive allergy tests without

getting a reaction. Allergy testing prior to introducing a pet into the home is also unhelpful as a negative test does not exclude the possibility of going on to develop an allergy to the animal.

Skin prick tests are safe. They can be done in clinic provided that the child has not had any antihistamines for a few days. Blood tests are not affected by antihistamines, but results are only available a week or so after the clinic appointment.

## How to manage pet allergy?

If you or your child has a pet allergy, it is best to avoid exposure to the animal. Dogs with short hair and “hypoallergenic dogs”, even hairless cats may cause symptoms.

It is difficult to reduce your child’s exposure to animals that live in your house. Making bedrooms a pet free zone can help. If your pet can safely live outdoors, then this will reduce pet allergy further.

Although rehousing pets can be very upsetting for families, it may have to be considered if a child’s symptoms seriously impact on their health and quality of life.

Even after a pet is removed from a home, the dander will remain for many months. Dander sticks to furniture and clothes and symptoms may occur after contact with pet owners, even when the pet is not present.

## Can you prevent pet allergy?

Owning a pet and regular exposure to animals in a child’s first year of life may protect against pet allergies, while persistent exposure only in later childhood may promote allergies.

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Ojwang V *et al.* Early exposure to cats, dogs and farm animals. . . *Pediatr Allergy Immunol*, 2020.  
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