

## What's the buzz about allergy shots?

One of the many joys of summer is being outdoors with family and friends. Summer brings hikes in the woods, evenings around the campfire, time at the lake, spending time with kids, excursions to fairs and festivals, and long days working in the yard. For many people, however, these activities are anything but joyful. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI), between 10-30% of people suffer from environmental allergies that prevent them from enjoying outdoor activities and events. Also, many people have severe reactions to bites from stinging insects, such as bees, yellow jackets, and fire ants.

There are over-the-counter and prescription medications that can be used to treat the symptoms of environmental allergies and individuals with insect allergies can carry emergency medication and take steps to treat stings. Still, having to take allergy medication daily or avoid places where stinging insects frequent can be an inconvenience and limit an individual's ability to fully enjoy all that summer has to offer. An alternative treatment approach that is appropriate and beneficial for some environmental and insect allergy sufferers is the administration of allergy shots.

### What are allergy shots?

Allergy shots (i.e., allergen immunotherapy) are a treatment option for some individuals who suffer from a variety of conditions, for example, hay fever, eye allergies, allergy-related asthma, and allergic reactions to insect stings. Allergy shots are a series of injections of the allergen that causes the individual's symptoms (pollen, dust mite, pet dander, insect venom, etc.). Each shot has a slightly higher concentration of the allergen. After an allergy shot is administered, the individual's immune system begins to build an internal tolerance or immunity to the allergen.

Allergy shots are administered in two phases. During the build-up phase, allergy shots are administered more frequently until the body develops a sufficient immunity to the allergen. After immunity is developed, the maintenance phase begins. Allergy shots are given on a less frequent basis during this phase and act as boosters for immunity.

### Who benefits from allergy shots?

- ✓ Individuals who are at least 5-years old
- ✓ Individuals who suffer from both allergy and asthma symptoms
- ✓ Individuals with allergy symptoms, including: itchy/watery eyes, nasal congestion, allergy-related asthma, or allergic reactions to insect stings
- ✓ Individuals who have not experienced relief from or who have had adverse side effects from other allergy medications/treatments
- ✓ Individuals who want to avoid long-term exposure to medications or ongoing costs associated with long-term medication usage
- ✓ Parents who wish to prevent against asthma and new allergy symptoms in their children

It is important to remember that allergy shots may not be suitable for all individuals. If you think allergy shots may be right for you or want to learn more, the next step is to meet with an allergist. Many insurance companies cover the cost of allergy testing and allergy shot treatments.