

# Relieving Allergies and Tailoring Care with Immunotherapy Shots



Questions & Answers



## Immunotherapy shots for allergy control in your pet.

You and your veterinarian have elected to identify the cause of your pet's allergy through testing and to treat with immunotherapy shots. Pet allergies can be a frustrating and long-term problem. Be assured that with immunotherapy shots, your veterinarian is recommending a long-term, medically appropriate treatment for this important member of your family.

Immunotherapy is one of the safest, most effective long-term treatments for allergy. It is the only therapy that targets the root cause of allergic reactions, unlike other treatments that just mask signs. For immunotherapy shots to have the greatest chance of success, it is important that you understand what the process involves and what your role is in helping to manage your pet's allergic disease.

### What are immunotherapy shots?

Immunotherapy shots are a medical treatment where allergens (*e.g.*, pollen, dander, molds, mites) to which your pet is allergic are injected beneath the skin (subcutaneously). Using the results of the allergy test and detailed history, immunotherapy treatment is formulated to contain the specific allergens identified as causing allergic problems in your pet. Successful use of immunotherapy shots changes the immune system to become less sensitive to those allergens. The goal of treatment with immunotherapy shots is to minimize the severity of clinical signs as well as reduce reliance on immunosuppressive drugs.

### How are the immunotherapy shots administered?

Immunotherapy shots contain precise quantities of allergens that are injected underneath the skin. The majority of pets do not object to these injections. Every pet's allergy condition is unique. Therefore, the dose

and interval between allergy treatment injections should be tailored according to your pet's response. For this reason, regular re-evaluations or "re-checks" by your pet's veterinarian (especially during the first year) are essential for achieving the best results.

### **Are immunotherapy shots safe?**

As with any injectable medication, there is a possible chance of serious allergic reaction to the injection. Such reactions are very rare. If you notice any unusual signs following an immunotherapy injection, such as weakness, labored or difficulty breathing, pale gums, vomiting, diarrhea, collapse or hives, contact your veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. These may be signs of serious reactions. Your pet should be observed for one hour after an injection is given.

### **Are there other reactions to watch for in my pet?**

A small amount of redness and itchiness may be seen at the site of the injection. Some pets can also show increased itchiness immediately after starting injections. Contact your veterinarian to discuss any reaction that you notice while your pet is on immunotherapy.

### **How soon can I expect to see improvement in my pet from immunotherapy shots?**

Many patients will start to experience a reduction in their signs in the first 4 to 6 months of therapy. It is recommended that immunotherapy shots be continued for at least 12 months before deciding whether or not it is the best way to manage your pet's allergies.

### **Can my pet receive other medications while on immunotherapy shots?**

Regular skin and coat care, particularly bathing, is an important part of managing your pet's allergy. Your veterinarian may also prescribe other treatments such as antihistamines, fatty acids, medicated shampoos, rinses or sprays to help keep your pet comfortable during the early stages of immunotherapy or

during allergy season. Additionally, anti-inflammatory medications can also be used without interfering with immunotherapy shots.

## How often will my pet require immunotherapy shots?

Initially, your pet will receive shots every 4 to 7 days. The goal is to lengthen the time between shots to an interval that provides the best control of signs, which is usually between 1 and 4 weeks. It is possible that some patients may be able to eventually stop receiving the shots and still maintain good control over their allergic signs. This decision needs to be made with your veterinarian and would only be suggested after your pet has achieved full resolution of his/her signs for an extended period of time.

## What if my dog or cat is not doing well on immunotherapy?

Some pets may not improve following treatment with immunotherapy shots. It is critical that you work closely with your veterinarian. Poor response may be due to secondary, often treatable, skin diseases such as yeast or bacterial infections, as well as flea infestations. In other cases, it may be necessary to change the contents or concentration of the shots. In selected cases, it may be beneficial to re-test your pet if it is suspected he/she has developed additional hypersensitivities.

## Are there any other measures I can take to help my allergic pet?

The table on the back of this brochure outlines environmental control measures to help minimize your pet's exposure to certain allergens. Remember some allergens are airborne, and you may be able to help your allergic pet by making some simple environmental changes.

You can significantly help your allergic pet by making simple environmental changes.

ALLERGEN	AVOIDANCE SUGGESTIONS
House Dust Mites, Fleas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wash bedding in hot water (over 130°F) weekly.</li><li>• Avoid letting pet sleep on overstuffed furniture (Restrict access to bedrooms. If pet sleeps on human's bed, use barrier type covers on mattress/pillow).</li><li>• Avoid stuffed toys.</li><li>• Keep pet in uncarpeted rooms when possible.</li><li>• Frequently damp mop in pet "holding" room.</li><li>• Change furnace filters frequently and keep humidity to a minimum (30–50%) in the home.</li><li>• Practice good flea control (consult with your veterinarian).</li></ul>
Molds, Storage Mites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep pets out of damp basements.</li><li>• Use dehumidifiers.</li><li>• Avoid barns/feed storage areas.</li><li>• Feed good quality pet food and store pet food in air-tight container.</li><li>• Clean pet food storage areas and bins with chlorine bleach solutions.</li><li>• Clean and disinfect humidifiers.</li><li>• Avoid having large numbers of houseplants.</li><li>• Avoid confining pets to rooms with high moisture levels (bathroom, basement, laundry room).</li><li>• Prevent access to crawl spaces under house.</li></ul>
Pollen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid fields.</li><li>• Keep grass cut short.</li><li>• Rinse pet after exposure to high grasses/weeds.</li><li>• Keep pet indoors at dusk and early morning during heavy pollen season.</li><li>• Use air conditioners.</li><li>• Keep pets indoors while mowing lawns.</li></ul>

