

Alabama Asthma Allergy and Immunology Center (AAIC) aka Huntsville Allergy Defines its Efforts to Ensure Safety During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updated on Sunday, April 5, 2020

- Our practice cares for patients with anaphylaxis or life-threatening insect sting reactions (bee, wasp, yellow jacket, hornets, fireant) who are on venom allergy shots, Severe asthma receiving regular biologic injections to prevent asthma exacerbations, Severe food allergies, Severe nose/sinus/eye allergies on allergy shots, Severe atopic dermatitis or Eczema and Immune deficiency. All these patients must continue to receive important medical care during this time. Compliance with all medications and therapies is essential, especially now. If their allergy treatment is reduced or discontinued, they will need high dose oral or injectable steroid medication with its side effects and end up in walk-in clinic or the emergency room which is what we want to avoid during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Huntsville Allergy is committed to protecting ALL of our patients and staff. Some of the safety measures and protocols we have include:

- Implementation of telehealth visits to greatly reduce the number of patients coming to our office.
- Rigorous screening to prevent anyone with COVID-19 related symptoms from entering our office.
- Stringent cleaning and sterilization procedures implemented to disinfect high traffic areas, exam rooms, and medical equipment.
- Daily screening symptom and temperature check of our staff prior to their shift.
- Altered check-in procedures to limit amount of time patient is in wait area.
- Re-configuration of waiting room to create social distance.
- Discontinuation of procedures such as food challenges and rush immunotherapy (desensitization).

Going forward, we ask all allergy shots patients adhere to the following procedures:

- We give allergy shots daily Monday thru Friday. Shot hours are as follows: 8am-3:30pm Monday thru Thursday and 8am-12:30pm on Friday. Please note: Tuesdays and Thursdays the last allergy shot WILL BE GIVEN at 3:30pm and NOT 6pm. In order to reduce the frequency of visits to the clinic, we would like shot patients to make the following interval changes: If you are on shots every 3-4

weeks, try coming every 5-6 weeks. If you are on shots every 2-3 weeks, try coming every 4 weeks. If you are on shots once weekly, try coming every 2 weeks. Please do not come to get allergy shots if you have a “cold” or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (new onset cough and/or fever and/or shortness of breath and/or loss of sense of smell and taste). When you come for allergy shots, the reception desk will sign you in. To help facilitate social distancing, after check-in you will be asked to wait in your car if the lobby, with limited seating, is full. As soon as the shot nurse is ready for you, we will text you to come in and get your shot. For your safety please wait 30 mins after your shot. If the lobby is full, you will be escorted to one of the exam rooms for your 30 minute observation time. Thank you for your continued patience with us during these difficult times.

- **30 Minute Wait after Immunotherapy Injection is Mandatory:** Although the risk of reaction after receiving an allergy immunotherapy injection is quite small, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology guidelines recommend that patients wait in the office for 30 minutes after receiving their allergy immunotherapy injection.
- If you are sick, please call your primary care physician. Any patient with new onset fever, cough, shortness of breath is considered to have COVID-19 until proven otherwise. If you have severe symptoms especially shortness of breath that is getting worse, please call 911 or go to nearest hospital emergency room and mask yourself as soon as you can. Please call them before you arrive. Please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html> for more information. Two other helpful links include [Allergies Vs. Coronavirus: Here's How to Tell the Difference](#), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): What People With Asthma Need to Know](#)
- All patients and guests will be screened as you enter the clinic for fever and related symptoms, travel history, and exposure risk. Please wear a mask as you enter our clinic.
- Guests of patients will not be permitted in the office or waiting room. This excludes parents of pediatric patients. One adult can accompany children.
- Patients over the age of 60 and patients with immunodeficiency diseases should contact our office prior to your scheduled appointment to assess the need for an office visit. A telehealth visit may be a better alternative at this time.
- Asthmatics coming for an office visit should bring their albuterol rescue inhaler (Proair, Ventolin etc) with them. For safety reasons we are not able to offer nebulizer treatments at this time.

Current Screening Guidelines for Patients/In-Office Visit:

We ask you to **call in advance or reschedule appointments** if you have any of the following:

- **You, or anyone in your household, have had a fever in the past 14 days (fever is temperature of 100 or above)**
- **You have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.**
- **You have had contact with a person who has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19.**

We want to thank our staff who are working tirelessly during the public health crisis to care for our patients and keep them healthy during this unprecedented time. Healthcare is one of the essential services as defined by the government:

“If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule.”

Frequently asked questions on COVID-19 with regards to allergy, asthma and immunodeficiency:

=What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new form of coronavirus first identified in December 2019. Coronaviruses in general are not new and are a common cause of colds and upper respiratory infections. We don't yet know why this new form, COVID-19, is more severe.

=How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly person-to-person, through respiratory droplets in coughs or sneezes. It can live on surfaces as well through these droplets.

=What is the time period when COVID-19 can spread?

Unfortunately, people can spread infection to others before symptoms first appear. It can then be spread for up to 14 days after symptom onset (possibly longer).

=What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The majority of people experience mild illness but severe illness and death can occur. Fever, cough and shortness of breath are the most common symptoms.

=How is COVID-19 treated?

There are no current vaccines, or anti-viral treatments to use when someone is acutely infected. Treatment relies on supportive care to treat symptoms when they occur.

=When should I seek emergency care?

Seek immediate medical attention if you have difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain or pressure, sudden confusion or inability to stay awake. These are not the only reasons someone may need emergency care – call your doctor for other concerns. Call any emergency department or medical provider BEFORE arrival to allow them to put precautions in place.

=Can I get tested for COVID-19 at your office?

The indications for testing as well as availability for testing are constantly changing. Please refer to our website for current information or call our office with any questions.

=When should I cancel my regularly scheduled allergy appointment?

Some non-urgent visits will likely be cancelled for you. If your visit hasn't been canceled, please call to discuss any specific concerns prior to arrival, especially if you have had recent travel to high risk countries or contact with anyone with known/suspected COVID-19. Also call before arrival if you have had fever/cough in the past two weeks.

=Is it safe to come to your office?

We are taking all recommended precautions to prevent spread of COVID-19, including reassessing what care must be done in a face-to-face manner, screening all patients and accompanying family members, regularly disinfecting exam rooms and public areas, and staying up to date with current recommendations from the local Department of Public Health.

=I'm getting allergy shots – what should I do?

Please refer to our website and facebook page for up-to-date information. We may need to change the way we administer allergy shots and will notify patients as soon as possible of any changes. Unless you hear differently, please continue your current schedule. However, for some patients, this may be held for the time being, and doses missed.

=Will your office be closing?

We may need to adjust the number of appointments or types of visits depending upon future spread of COVID-19. Please refer to our website and facebook page for the most up to date information.

=What if I have asthma? How will COVID-19 affect me?

We don't have a lot of information regarding risk of asthma exacerbation with COVID-19. For now, we recommend continuing all currently prescribed daily asthma medications, calling our office if you have had frequent symptoms or needed your rescue inhaler more often, and starting your asthma treatment plan as soon as possible if symptoms occur.

=Are steroids harmful if someone has COVID-19?

It does not appear that inhaled steroids are harmful for treatment of asthma. Risk of stopping regular use of inhaled steroids include a loss of asthma control and possible need for treatment with oral steroids. Please do not stop any medications without discussing with your doctor.

=I have an immune deficiency – what precautions should I take?

Please contact your doctor directly to discuss any necessary precautions. There are a wide range of immune deficiencies that may have different risk. All general precautions should be followed as outlined above.