

Allergies and dogs

What is an allergic reaction?

In cases of an allergic reaction, the immune system has developed an inappropriately oversensitive response to an otherwise harmless substance (allergen).

Prevalence of allergies to dogs

It is estimated that approximately 8% of adults in the UK are allergic to dog allergens, which is similar to the rates of food allergies (~6%). In the same study 4 times more people were allergic to pollen and house dust mites twice as many to cats^{1, 2}.

How can you reduce the risk of allergic reactions to dogs?

Studies have revealed that dog and cat allergens can be detected at significant levels in public buildings such as schools and day care centres where these animals have never been allowed^{3,4,5}. This presumably occurs via transfer from the clothes of pet-owning individuals.

Cleaning; Soft furnishings and carpeted areas can act as a reservoir for dog, cat and dust mite allergens. The regularity and intensity of the cleaning regime will impact on how much allergen is present. Products are available which can be used to greatly reduce the airborne allergens in a room. Air-conditioning and the use of HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter vacuums have both been shown to significantly reduce the levels of dust mite allergens indoors^{6,7}.

Allergen reduction products; There are lotions available which may reduce the amount of allergen on a dogs coat if used regularly. Similarly there are products available that reduce the amount of airborne pet allergens.

Good hygiene practice; Individuals should be encouraged to wash their hands after contact with dogs. Dog bedding should be washed regularly and dog toys should be cleaned daily. Beds and toys made of hard plastic will not harbour as much dog or dust mite allergens.

What do Assistance Dogs organisations do to reduce risk?

The health and behaviour of assistance dogs is carefully monitored. The dogs are groomed regularly which may decrease levels of some dog allergens and the shedding of hair as well as removing saliva from the coat. Regular veterinary checks means the dog receives prompt treatment for any conditions. An assistance dog will be kept on a premium quality diet which can help to reduce dander (shed skin flakes) production.

Assistance dogs have an established reliable toileting routine and have been assessed for appropriate temperament and excellent obedience.

Is there such a thing as a hypoallergenic dog breed?

Evidence suggests that no breed is hypoallergenic, but individual dogs vary greatly in the amount of allergens they produce.

What should you do if you are concerned you are allergic to dogs?

If there is reason for concern it is advisable you seek the advice of your GP. It is possible to perform simple tests to identify what you are allergic to.

Further research information

See additional PDF '**Common allergens and allergic reactions to dogs**'

References

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