

What is Cluster Immunotherapy?

Cluster immunotherapy is an accelerated schedule for allergy injections. Cluster schedules involve the administration of several injections (two to three) of increasing dose at 30-minute intervals in one day. You will return every 2-10 days, allowing for 1-2 visits per week depending on your individual plan and tolerance, while following the building schedule. Maintenance dosing is achieved in seven to nine weeks, depending upon the spacing of the visits.

The extract is prepared especially for you, based on your skin test results and symptoms. The treatment material may contain one or more of the following allergens: Trees, Grasses, Weeds, Molds, Dust Mite, Cockroach, and Animal Dander.

What are the benefits of Cluster Immunotherapy?

An accelerated injection schedule offers the benefit of reaching maintenance dose faster; therefore providing earlier relief. Compliance markedly improves as well.

An accelerated schedule may be of benefit if:

- Unable to achieve maintenance dose with conventional immunotherapy due to systemic reactions.
- Schedule does not allow weekly injections for an extended period of time.
- Asthma cannot be adequately controlled for a prolonged period but can be controlled long enough to receive an accelerated schedule.

What are the risks of Cluster Immunotherapy?

Cluster schedules may be associated with an increased risk of systemic reaction; however, if premedication is used, the frequency of systemic reactions is decreased. With both conventional and cluster schedules, you are receiving injections of substances to which you are allergic and there is the possibility you may develop an allergic reaction. These reactions are usually mild and limited to the injection site (soreness, redness, warmth, itching, or swelling).

More severe reactions may include sneezing; nasal congestion; red, itchy, swollen eyes; hives; stomach or uterine cramping; vomiting; diarrhea; swelling of the lips, tongue, and/or throat; wheezing, cough, or asthma symptoms; rapid heart rate, or drop in blood pressure or shock. Fatal reactions with immunotherapy have been described.

What is involved in Cluster Immunotherapy?

Prior to each cluster visit (1 hour before is recommended), you will be required to take two over-the-counter antihistamines, an H1 antihistamine (Claritin, Zyrtec, Allegra, or generic equivalent) and an H2 antihistamine (Axid, Pepcid, Tagamet or generic equivalent), which are shown to decrease the number and severity of allergic reactions. You will also be prescribed an epinephrine auto-injector which you must bring for your first cluster visit. Cluster immunotherapy must be initiated **at the beginning** of your immunotherapy program. Allow for a minimum of 1-1.5 hours to complete each cluster visit (30-minute wait after each injection in the cluster). A maximum of 10 days between cluster visits must be maintained to avoid drop back and/or possible discontinuation of cluster build. If you elect to build in a conventional immunotherapy program, you may not return to a cluster build unless restarting your program from the beginning.

What can I expect during the visit?

You will receive incremental doses of your allergy extract at 30-minute intervals. You will not be able to leave during your cluster visit, so please allow a minimum of 1-1.5 hours. If any allergic reaction occurs, appropriate medication will be administered and may include adrenaline (epinephrine), and the cluster visit will be discontinued. Epinephrine is generally administered in the thigh muscle.

When do I see a provider?

Please schedule a follow-up appointment 3 months after starting immunotherapy to review your program and discuss lowering your medications.

What can I expect after the visit(s)?

Subsequent injections must be received every 2-10 days to increase dose (whether cluster or conventional build). A 30-minute wait time following each injection is required (cluster or stand-alone injection). If you receive your injection at an alternate medical facility, a 30-minute wait is still required. The facility must also be equipped with epinephrine in the event an allergic reaction occurs.

When are you open for injections?

Injections are given Monday-Thursday. Hours are posted on our website (grandrapidsallergy.com) and Facebook page. No injections are given on Friday. Please note that Cluster administration hours differ to allow time to complete each cluster visit. Your first cluster injection administration will need to be scheduled with our scheduling department at least 48 hours in advance of when you plan to come in to the office. Subsequent injections will be available during our listed cluster injection hours.