



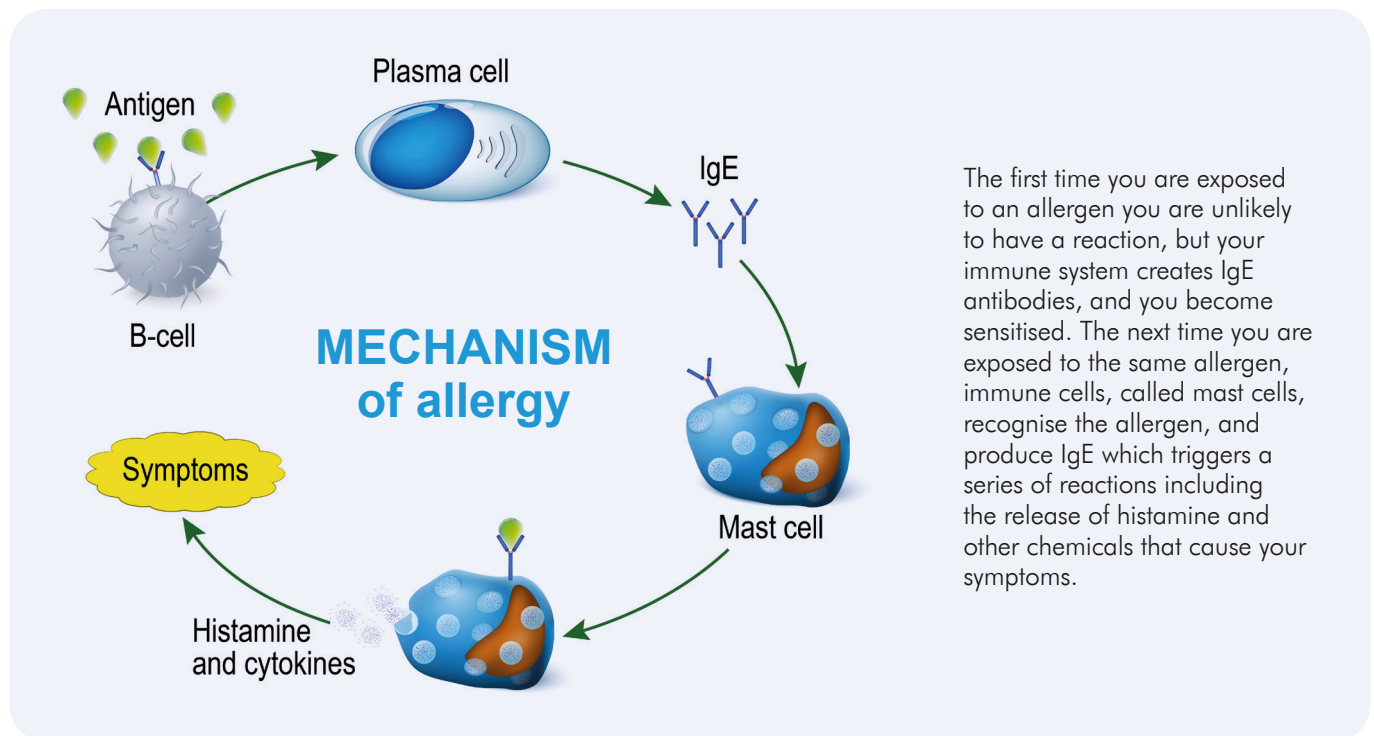
# PATHOLOGY TESTS EXPLAINED

Information about pathology tests to help everyone take control of their health and make the right decisions about their care.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT **IgE ALLERGY TESTING**

If your doctor thinks that you could have an allergy, they may ask you to have a test to measure the amount of IgE antibodies in your blood. Antibodies, also called immunoglobulins, are made by the immune system to protect your body from harmful things like bacteria and viruses. IgE is a type of antibody associated with allergic reactions. It is normally found in very small amounts in the blood. If you have allergies, you may have more IgE antibodies in your blood than normal.

Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to things that are typically harmless to most people – things like grass seeds, pollen, dust mites, mould, pets, and certain foods like nuts, eggs, and fish. Substances that cause allergies are called allergens.



The first time you are exposed to an allergen you are unlikely to have a reaction, but your immune system creates IgE antibodies, and you become sensitised. The next time you are exposed to the same allergen, immune cells, called mast cells, recognise the allergen, and produce IgE which triggers a series of reactions including the release of histamine and other chemicals that cause your symptoms.



### Testing

A total IgE test measures the overall number of IgE antibodies in the blood, while a specific IgE test measures IgE antibodies that respond to individual allergens.

#### Total IgE

Your doctor may start by ordering total IgE especially if they are unsure what is causing your symptoms. However, it does not give levels for specific allergens. Also, total IgE can be raised in some people who do not have an allergy.

#### Specific IgE testing

Specific IgE tests measure how much IgE your body makes in response to a single allergen. A separate test is done for each allergen that may be causing your allergy such as for peanuts or for a group of allergens. Typical groups include food panels such as dairy or seafood or regional weed, grass and mould panels. Alternatively, you and your doctor may pick and choose selectively from a list of allergens suspected of causing your allergies.



## What your results can tell you

Your results will be presented along with those of your other tests on the same form. You will see separate columns or lines for each of these tests.

High levels of IgE usually indicate an allergy, but even if you are IgE positive for a specific allergen, it does not mean you will necessarily have an allergic reaction when exposed to that substance. Also, the test cannot tell you how severe your symptoms will be. There may be other causes of an elevated IgE. Your clinical history can help your doctor make a diagnosis and further tests may be needed.

If your total or allergen-specific IgE level is within the expected range for healthy people it probably indicates that you are less likely to have a true IgE related allergy to a specific allergen, but the results of the test must always be interpreted by your doctor.

Other conditions that do not involve IgE can cause symptoms of allergy, so if your level is not suggestive of an IgE allergy, your doctor may investigate to see if you have another condition such as coeliac disease or lactase deficiency.



## What are reference intervals (reference ranges)?

Some of your results are shown in your report as a comparison against a set of numbers called reference intervals or reference ranges. This is the range of test results considered 'normal' for the general population.

If a result in your report is outside this range it can be flagged as high (H) or low (L). This does not necessarily mean that anything is wrong. It depends on your personal situation. Your results need to be interpreted by your doctor.



### Questions to ask your doctor

- Why does this test need to be done?
- Do I need to prepare (such as fast or avoid medications) for the sample collection?
- Will an abnormal result mean I need further tests?
- How could it change the course of my care?
- What will happen next, after the test?

For more detailed information on these and many other tests go to [pathologytestsexplained.org.au](http://pathologytestsexplained.org.au)



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EXPLAINED

[www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au](http://www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au)

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Pathology Tests Explained is managed by a consortium of medical and scientific organisations representing pathology practice in Australia. More details at:

[www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au/about](http://www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au/about)



Please use this QR code to access more information

### My Health Record

You'll find a direct link to the Pathology Tests Explained website embedded in the pathology results pages of your My Health Record and the my health app.

Click on the link to find information about what your tests are investigating or measuring and what your results can tell your doctor.