First Dose mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Allergic Reactions: Limited Role for Excipient Skin Testing

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1	First Dose mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Allergic Reactions: Limited Role for Excipient Skin
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59	Abstract:
60	Background: CDC states that a severe or immediate allergic reaction to the first dose of an
61	mRNA COVID-19 vaccine is a contraindication for the second dose.
62	Objective : To assess outcomes associated with excipient skin testing after a reported allergic
63	reaction to mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose one.
64	Methods: We identified a consecutive sample of patients with reported allergic reactions after
65	the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine who underwent allergy assessment with skin testing
66	to polyethylene glycol (PEG) and, if appropriate, polysorbate 80. Skin testing results in

conjunction with clinical phenotyping of the first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reaction

guided second dose vaccination recommendation. Second dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine

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reactions were assessed.

70	Results : 80 patients with reported first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine allergic reactions (n=65,
71	81% immediate onset) underwent excipient skin testing. 14 (18%) had positive skin tests to PEG
72	(n=5) and/or polysorbate 80 (n=12). Skin testing result did not impact tolerance of second dose
73	in patients with immediate or delayed reactions. Of 70 (88%) patients who received their second
74	mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose, 62 (89%) had either no reaction or a mild reaction managed
75	with antihistamines, but two patients required epinephrine. Three patients with positive PEG-
76	3350 intradermal (methylprednisolone) testing tolerated second dose mRNA COVID-19
77	vaccination. Refresh Tears caused non-specific irritation.
78	Conclusion: Most individuals with a reported allergic reaction to dose one of the mRNA
79	COVID-19 vaccines, regardless of skin test result, received the second dose safely. More data
80	are needed on the value of skin prick testing to PEG (Miralax) in evaluating patients with mRNA
81	COVID-19 vaccine anaphylaxis. Refresh Tears should not be used for skin testing.
82	
83	
84	
85	Highlights Box:
86	1. What is already known about this topic? An expert-informed risk stratification protocol was
87	recommended to guide clinical care after mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reactions, however, at the
88	time there was no supportive evidence available.

89	2. What does this article add to our knowledge? Most individuals after first dose mRNA COVID-
90	19 vaccine reactions, regardless of excipient skin testing result, were able to safely receive the
91	second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose. Refresh Tears were irritating and should not be used for
92	skin testing to polysorbate 80.
93	3. How does this study impact current management guidelines? More data on the value of skin
94	prick testing to PEG (Miralax) in evaluating patients with mRNA COVID vaccine anaphylaxis is
95	needed and the positive predictive value remains unknown. Most patients may be able to proceed
96	to second vaccination without skin testing.
97	
98	Key words: COVID-19 vaccine, drug allergy, vaccine allergy, COVID-19, PEG allergy, skin
99	testing, Polysorbate allergy, excipient allergy, anaphylaxis.
100	
101	Abbreviations:
102	Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-2019)
103	Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)
104	Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
105	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
106	Polyethylene glycol (PEG)
107	Mass General Brigham (MGB)
108	E-consult (electronic consult)
109	Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH)
110	Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH)
111	REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture)
112	Electronic Health Record (EHR)
113	Standard Deviation (SD)
114	Interquartile Range (IQR)
115	Negative Predictive Value (NPV)

116 Intradermal (ID)

Introduction:

117

118 One year after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease-2019) 119 a pandemic, greater than 138 million people have been infected and every country in the world has been impacted. It was with excitement and hope that millions of Americans welcomed the 120 121 approval of two novel COVID-19 mRNA vaccines in December 2020. However, almost immediately following Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)² by the Food and Drug 122 Administration (FDA) of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 mRNA vaccine, initial reports of 123 anaphylaxis and allergic reactions began. When the Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccine was 124 approved soon thereafter, similar reports emerged.³ The reports of anaphylaxis prompted the 125 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop formal guidance for 126 administration of the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, stating that 127 patients with a history of anaphylaxis to vaccine components should not receive mRNA COVID-128 19 vaccines, ⁴ and patients with a history of an immediate allergic reaction to the first dose of 129 mRNA COVID-19 vaccine should not receive the second dose.⁵ 130 In December, 2020, national anaphylaxis rates were reported by the CDC initially to be as high 131 as 11.1 per million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, but, by January, 2021, 132 133 CDC estimates reported an anaphylaxis incidence of 2.5 to 4.7 per million doses of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines, respectively. In the first prospective real world 134 cohort of 60,000 employees vaccinated at a large healthcare system (Mass General Brigham, 135 [MGB]), an incidence of 2.5 cases of anaphylaxis per 10,000 mRNA COVID-19 vaccines 136 administered was reported.⁸ The cause of allergic reactions to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines 137

remains unknown, but the excipient PEG-2000, present in the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, has
been an important focus of investigation with recent limited supportive evidence. 10 Furthermore,
the utility of skin testing to PEG and polysorbate 80 was unclear but experts suspected excipient
skin testing to have a high positive predictive value and a low negative predictive value. 11,12 At
the time of publication, there are three COVID-19 vaccines which have received FDA EUA: two
contain PEG-2000 (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccines) and one
contains polysorbate 80 (Janssen adenovirus vector vaccine). Thus, it is important to understand
whether there is a relationship between allergy to these excipients and allergic reactions to the
COVID-19 vaccines. ⁹
Our risk stratification algorithm ¹³ uses clinical history with skin testing to PEG and/or
polysorbate to evaluate higher risk individuals who report a history of an immediate allergic
reaction to a first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Herein, we report the outcomes of
individuals referred for reported allergic reactions to a first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine
that completed skin testing and followed our initial published skin testing guidance. 13 We review
patient and reaction characteristics with skin testing findings along with second dose vaccine
outcomes that motivate an updated approach to individuals who present following a reported
allergic reaction to the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

156 157	Methods: This cohort included consecutive patients referred for an in-person allergy/immunology excipient
158	skin testing visit which occurred at MGB between January 6 and March 3, 2021 after a first dose
159	mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reaction. In-person visits occurred after initial allergy/immunology
160	telemedicine visits with clinical phenotyping and risk stratification. All included patients
161	received their first mRNA vaccine dose at an MGB vaccination clinic with second doses
162	scheduled at the vaccination clinics associated with the MGB academic medical centers:
163	Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) or Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH).
164	We recommended excipient skin testing to all patients who reported symptoms concerning for an
165	IgE-mediated allergy within 4 hours of vaccination. Patients with symptoms consistent with an
166	allergic reaction which was delayed (occurring more than 4 hours after vaccination but before
167	day 3 post vaccination) may also have proceeded to excipient skin testing, especially if the
168	symptoms were more severe or patient preference using shared decision-making. For patients
169	who reported symptoms which were potentially IgE-mediated but subjective (e.g., globus or itch
170	without rash), the decision to proceed to skin testing was also based on shared decision-making
171	considering patient preferences. Interested and eligible patients were referred for an in-person
172	excipient skin testing appointment at either MGH or BWH. Approximately 14% of patients with
173	first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reactions were referred for in-person excipient skin testing
174	using our algorithm. ¹³
175	
176	At MGH, PEG skin testing was performed using Miralax, a laxative containing PEG-3350,
177	epicutaneous and methylprednisolone acetate (containing PEG-3350 only ¹³) intradermally
178	(Table E1). 13 If methylprednisolone acetate was positive, methylprednisolone sodium succinate

was used as a control to exclude methylprednisolone as the cause of allergy. At MGH, for
individuals with first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reactions, skin testing to polysorbate 80
(using triamcinolone acetonide ¹⁴) was performed if PEG skin testing was positive to help guide
future COVID-19 vaccination or if the patient reported a history of a reaction to another vaccine
containing polysorbate 80. At BWH, PEG (Miralax and methylprednisolone acetate containing
PEG 3350 only) skin testing was similar although polysorbate 80 testing used Refresh Tears and
was performed regardless of PEG skin testing result. All sites required adequate positive
(histamine) and negative (saline) controls for epicutaneous and intradermal tests. Patients with
negative skin testing were advised to proceed to second dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccination.
Shared decision-making was used for patients with positive skin test to PEG and/or polysorbate
80.
We used excipient skin testing alone without mRNA COVID-19 vaccine skin testingwhich
has since been described, 15,16 as we did not have access at the time to mRNA COVID-19 vaccine
for skin testing purposes and the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines were the first vaccines of their
kind. It was not apparent that any prior vaccine guidance ¹⁷ could be accurately applied to these
vaccines and there was initial concern that dilution could degrade mRNA so it could not be used
as a skin testing product nor as a graded challenge. 18
Due to concern which arose during this study for irritant skin testing reactions to Refresh Tears,
control skin tests were performed on 25 non-allergic subjects who reported clinical tolerance to
polysorbate 80.
Data Collection and Definitions

202	Clinical data were gathered from manual electronic health record (EHR) review by trained
203	research assistants (AEM, ASC) with allergist oversight (ARW, LBR, LL). Structured MGB
204	allergist note templates used during clinic visits facilitated accurate demographic, past medical
205	and allergy history, skin test results, and outcomes. Study data were collected and managed using
206	REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) tools. 19,20
207	
208	Immediate allergic reactions were defined as occurring within the first four hours, and delayed
209	allergic reactions occurred anytime thereafter. Reaction details were categorized by organ system
210	of involvement. Cutaneous included itching, rash, hives, flushing and swelling. Cardiovascular
211	included hypotension and tachycardia. Lower respiratory included cough, wheezing, chest
212	tightness or shortness of breath. Upper airway included globus, hoarseness, and throat swelling.
213	Gastrointestinal included abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.
214	
215	For patients who received their second mRNA COVID-19 vaccination, we assessed tolerance of
216	the vaccine using three days of electronically-disseminated symptoms surveys. If a patient did
217	not respond to all three days of the survey, or if they reported allergic symptoms on the survey,
218	they were contacted by phone or e-mail message by an allergist/immunologist (ARW) to assess
219	tolerance of the second dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals who received the
220	Janssen vaccine in lieu of second mRNA COVID-19 vaccines were considered to have not
221	received their second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose but to have been completely vaccinated.
222	
223	The index allergic reaction to the first mRNA COVID-19 vaccine and, when relevant, the
224	allergic reaction to the second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, were graded using Ring and Messmer

225	criteria ²¹ (Table E2) by two allergists independently; in the case of discordant grading, a third
226	allergist was used to determine the final grade (ARW, LBR, LL). We defined second dose
227	tolerance as either no allergic reaction or a grade 0 reaction with mild subjective symptoms that
228	did not require treatment.
229	
230	This study was approved by the MGB Partners Institutional Review Board, protocol number
231	2020P004068.
232	
233	Data Analysis
234	Data are presented as counts with frequencies for categorical data and means with standard
235	deviation (SD) or medians with interquartile ranges (IQR) for continuous variables, as indicated.
236	All analyses were performed in SAS (version 9.4, Cary, NC, USA). We calculated the negative
237	predictive value (NPV) for PEG skin testing result and having a reaction with mRNA COVID-19
238	vaccine dose two for the entire sample and considering only patients with immediate reactions.
239	
240	Results:
241	There were 80 patients who underwent excipient skin testing at MGB after a reported allergic
242	reaction to the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Table 1). 18 (23%) reported a reaction
243	to Pfizer-BioNTech and 62 (77%) to the Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. 38,933 (60%)
244	Moderna and 25,906 (40%) Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines were administered at MGB during the
245	study period and a total of 576 allergy/immunology telehealth visits were performed for
246	COVID-19 vaccine reactions.
247	

248	Patient Characteristics
249	Patients were predominantly female (89%) and white (78%) with mean age 40.9 ± 13.6 years.
250	Past medical history included a history of non-anaphylactic IgE mediated food allergy (n=29,
251	36%), asthma (n=25, 31%), anaphylaxis to medications, foods, venom or latex (n=22, 28%),
252	allergic rhinitis (n=20, 25%), polysorbate allergy (n=5, 6%), atopic dermatitis (n=4, 5%), and
253	PEG allergy (n=2, 3%) (Table 1).
254	
255	Reaction Characteristics
256	There were 65 (81%) patients reporting an immediate reaction; 40 (62%) occurred within the
257	first 30 minutes with the median onset of symptoms within 10 [IQR: 5,15] minutes. The
258	following symptoms were reported: cutaneous (n=51, 78%), lower respiratory (n=14, 22%),
259	cardiovascular (n=10, 15%), and subjective symptoms including lightheadedness and tingling
260	(n=21, 32%). 47 (72%) patients received antihistamine treatment and 6 (9%) received
261	epinephrine; 18 (28%) were treated in the emergency department. Of the 65 immediate allergic
262	reactions, 21 (32%) were grade 0, 33 (51%) were grade 1, and 11 (17%) were grade 2. All
263	individuals recovered from their reaction without long-term sequalae.
264	
265	There were 15 (19%) patients who experienced delayed allergic reactions; 1 (7%) patient
266	received Pfizer and 14 (93%) received Moderna (Table 1). Of these, 11 (73%) had symptoms
267	within the first 24 hours after receiving the vaccine and 4 (27%) had symptoms starting 24 hours
268	or more after the vaccine was administered. The delayed symptoms were most frequently
269	cutaneous (n=14, 93%), other symptoms as in Table 1. One patient was treated in the emergency
270	department.

271	
272	Skin Testing Results
273	Of the 80 patients who underwent excipient skin testing, 33 had testing to PEG only, 47 had
274	testing to PEG and polysorbate 80 (n=41 to Refresh Tears; n=6 to triamcinolone acetonide). In
275	all, 14 (18%) had a positive skin test result (Table 2): PEG only (n=2), PEG and polysorbate 80
276	(n=3), and polysorbate 80 only (n=9, Figure 1a). All polysorbate 80 positive individuals were
277	positive on skin testing to Refresh Tears (n=12), which was found to be an irritant in 13 of 25
278	(52%) non-allergic controls (Table E3). Among the 65 patients presenting with an immediate
279	allergic reaction, 8 (12%) had positive skin tests: PEG (n= 2), PEG and polysorbate 80 (n=2),
280	and polysorbate 80 (n=4, Figure 1b). These patients with PEG positive skin tests were positive
281	on intradermal testing to methylprednisolone acetate 4 mg/mL (n=1), methylprednisolone acetate
282	0.4 mg/mL (n=2) and to Miralax 1:100 epicutaneous (n=1). Among the 15 patients with a
283	delayed allergic reaction, 6 (40%) had positive skin testing: 5 (33%) to polysorbate 80 and 1
284	(7%) to both PEG (intradermal testing to methylprednisolone acetate 0.4mg/mL) and polysorbate
285	80 (Figure 1c). No allergic or adverse events occurred during any skin testing procedures.
286	
287	Tolerance of the Second Dose of the Vaccine Overall
288	Of the 80 patients who underwent excipient skin testing, 70 (88%) received a second dose of the
289	same mRNA COVID-19 vaccine and 52 (74%) tolerated the second dose vaccine without a
290	reaction (Figure 1a). The NPV of a negative skin test to PEG predicted a 75% likelihood of
291	tolerating the second dose of the vaccine
292	

Among the 65 patients who reported an immediate allergic reaction to the first dose of mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine, 58 (89%) received their second dose of the vaccine, and 43 (74%) tolerated
their second dose without reaction (Figure 1b); 2 (3%) received epinephrine treatment for their
second dose reaction. Among the 65 patients who reported an immediate reaction to the first
dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, the NPV of a negative skin test to PEG was 75%.
Tolerance of the Second Dose of the Vaccine Among Skin Test Negative Patients
Overall, 66 (83%) patients were skin test negative and 60 (91%) of these patients went on to
receive their second dose of the vaccine, 45 (75%), ultimately had the second dose of the vaccine
without recurrent symptoms. Among the 65 patients who reported an immediate allergic reaction
to the first dose of mRNA COVID vaccine, 57 (88%) were skin test negative, 52 (80%) received
their second dose of the vaccine, and 39 (75%) had no symptoms with the second dose. There
were 13 (25%) patients who were skin test negative but reacted to the second dose of the
vaccine, and their most common symptoms were cutaneous (n=11) but 4 (31%) patients were
seen in the Emergency Department and 2 (15%) received epinephrine (Table 3).
Among the 15 individuals who reported a delayed reaction after the first dose of mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine, 9 (60%) were skin test negative and 8 (89%) received their second vaccine
dose; 6 of 8 (75%) tolerated the second dose without reaction. Two patients who were skin test
negative but reacted to the second dose of the vaccine reported the following symptoms: one had
mild swelling of throat, tongue, and eyes, pruritus without rash on face and chest, no treatment
was sought; one had pruritus and erythema of arms, with pruritus of lips and neck, treated with
antihistamines.

Tolerance of the Second Dose of the Vaccine Among Skin Test Positive Patients
Among the 8 (12%) patients who reported a history of an immediate allergic reaction and a
positive skin test: 4 (67%) tolerated the vaccine (skin test positive to: polysorbate 80/Refresh
Tears [n=2], PEG/methylprednisolone acetate ID [n=1], PEG/ methylprednisolone acetate ID
and polysorbate 80/Refresh Tears [n=1]); 2 (33%) had mild allergic reactions; 2 (25%) after
shared decision-making, opted to not receive the second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose (both
skin test positive to PEG, 1 patient was skin prick positive to Miralax and 1 patient opted to
instead receive the Janssen vaccine) (Table 2). The two patients with dose two reactions were
positive to Refresh Tears and both had mild symptoms. The two patients who had PEG skin test
positive but tolerated the vaccine were positive to methylprednisolone acetate on intradermal
testing; the only patient with a positive to Miralax on epicutaneous testing had experienced
anaphylaxis requiring epinephrine after the first dose of the vaccine and was not re-challenged.
Among the 15 patients who reported a delayed allergic reaction to the first dose of mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine, there were 6 with a positive skin test, 3 tolerated the vaccine (skin test
positive to: polysorbate 80/Refresh Tears [n=2], PEG/methylprednisolone acetate ID and
polysorbate 80/Refresh Tears [n=1]); 1 had a mild allergic reaction; and 2 have not received dose
two (skin test positive to polysorbate 80/Refresh Tears). The patient who had a dose two
reaction was positive to polysorbate 80/Refresh Tears and experienced subjective symptoms
(Table 2). The patient with positive skin testing to PEG was positive only on intradermal testing
to methylprednisolone acetate.

Discussion:

Among 80 individuals referred for excipient skin testing after a reported allergic reaction to the
first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine the vast majority of patients received the second mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine dose safely irrespective of skin test results. Two patients who were treated
with epinephrine after their second dose had been treated with epinephrine after their first dose
as well. However, three additional patients that received epinephrine after their first dose
tolerated their second vaccine, therefore, while there are no clear risk factors, this is an important
issue for physicians to discuss with patients that were treated with epinephrine after the first dose
of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Notably, it is possible that epinephrine was not necessary in
these cases. Overall, excipient skin testing did not add value to the clinical risk assessment in
those reporting first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reactions even when applied to a highly
selected group that represented just 14% of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reactions evaluated by
allergy/immunology in this period overall. However, PEG skin prick testing may be useful in
guiding second dose vaccination in individuals with anaphylaxis to the first dose of the mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine although its positive predictive value remains unknown.
Based on our data and experience to date, we propose an updated risk stratification algorithm
after reported first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine allergic reactions (Figure 2). First, the
clinical history still remains the most important aspect in the allergist evaluation; using shared
decision-making, most individuals with reactions to the first dose of an mRNA COVID-19
vaccine can proceed safely with second dose. ²²⁻²⁴ Second, excipient skin testing is favored over
vaccine skin testing, 15,16 as vaccine is largely inaccessible to most allergists and the mRNA

vaccines are still under EUA. Third, in terms of premedication, although some patients in the

cohort were pre-treated with antihistamines or steroids, this study was not designed to determine

an optimal premedication regimen. The authors have used premedication with non-sedating
antihistamines for patients with mild symptoms such as delayed urticaria, but try to restrict use of
glucocorticoids that may an unfavorable immunologic effect. ²⁵ Fourth, in our experience to date,
PEG skin testing was of limited utility (n=5 with positive skin tests), and should only be
considered in specific cases, e.g. patients with convincing history of anaphylaxis to mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine or recently to oral PEG-containing medications. Lastly, methylprednisolone
acetate or PEG intradermal skin testing did not provide additional information to guide safety of
second dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccination as patients (n=3) with positive skin testing to this
tolerated the vaccine, in our experience. We thus suggest that, when PEG excipient testing is
warranted, epicutaneous testing to Miralax (PEG3350) alone is adequate. ^{10,11,12} In our
experience, consistent with rare true cases of anaphylaxis to the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines,
Miralax skin testing was positive in one patient with symptoms consistent with anaphylaxis. This
patient did not receive a second dose of COVID-19 vaccine so the positive predictive value of
Miralax skin testing remains unknown. (Figure E1).
The cause of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine allergic reactions remains unclear and may be
multifactorial, but one case report linked PEG as a possible allergen 10 and an improved
understanding of the role for excipient skin testing to PEG in individuals with a history of
anaphylaxis to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines is still needed. While we were able to calculate the
NPV for PEG skin testing and tolerance with dose two, we were unable to calculate sensitivity,
specificity, and/or positive predictive value. There were two patients who reported histories of
being allergic to PEG (reported after their first dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine reaction).
Interestingly, both were PEG skin test negative and 1 patient tolerated dose two without
symptoms and the other developed subjective globus sensation after dose two treated with

antihistamines only. Three patients positive on intradermal PEG (methylprednisolone acetate)
skin testing tolerated their second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose without any reactions.
Additionally, in our experience, a portion of skin test negative patients had reactions to their
mRNA COVID-19 vaccine second dose. While the majority had easily treatable reactions and
are now fully vaccinated, importantly, two were treated with epinephrine and four were treated in
the Emergency Department, emphasizing the important role for an allergist in the care of these
patients. Thus, since skin test positive patients tolerated the second dose of the vaccine and skin
test negative patients had reactions, skin testing did not add additional information regarding the
tolerance of the second mRNA COVID-19 vaccine dose.
Due to the high rate of skin test positivity to Refresh Tears, which was used as a source of
polysorbate 80 in the BWH study population, we tested a new control group (Table E3).
Approximately half of the non-allergic controls had positive skin test results suggesting that
Refresh Tears is likely causing an irritant, or false positive, skin test reaction. These findings
prompted us to modify our initial algorithmic approach and also to contact all MGB patients with
positive skin tests to Refresh Tears to modify our initial advice and encourage mRNA COVID-
19 vaccination. None of the patients with positive skin tests to Refresh Tears that received the
second dose of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine developed an allergic reaction, but three patients
had subjective symptoms and were treated with antihistamines only.
Vaccine hesitancy is an important issue that may be exacerbated by adverse and/or allergic
symptoms after the first dose of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, and we are eager to reassure our
patients regarding the vaccine's safety in order to encourage vaccination. ²⁷ In our cohort of
individuals referred for skin testing 10 out of 80 have not received their second dose of mRNA

407	COVID-19 vaccine, although only 2 were advised by our group to not receive mRNA COVID-
408	19 vaccine (a third patient received Janssen vaccine). The reasons for incomplete vaccination are
409	not clear, but may include vaccine administration logistics, unclear benefit of second dose
410	vaccination, and/or concern about having a recurrent allergic or adverse reaction. ²⁸ The allergist
411	may not be able to address all these barriers, but the allergist can acknowledge them, 29 and,
412	based on these data, provide reassurance around receiving the second dose if the clinical history
413	is low risk. 12,13,16,30 The allergist also has an important role in helping to correctly recognize and
414	treat allergic reactions, so allergist-observed second dose vaccinations may help reassure our
415	patients.
416	Recently, the CDC added guidance allowing Janssen COVID-19 vaccine at least 28 days after ar
417	allergic reaction to a first dose of mRNA COVID vaccine, broadening our patients' options. ⁵ The
418	Janssen COVID-19 vaccine contains the excipient polysorbate 80 but not PEG and therefore
419	could be administered without skin testing to PEG in patients concerned about PEG allergy.
420	Janssen COVID-19 vaccine could also be considered in an individual with a history of PEG
421	allergy or PEG skin test positivity but a negative polysorbate 80 skin test or tolerance of vaccine
422	with polysorbate 80 (Figure 2). Reassuringly, to date, the rate of allergic reactions to the
423	Janssen vaccine appears exceedingly low. ³¹ One patient in our cohort who had reported an
424	immediate allergic reaction to Moderna, then had positive skin testing to methylprednisolone
425	acetate and Refresh Tears has subsequently tolerated the Janssen vaccine. This is an important
426	option for our high-risk patients with possible PEG allergy.
427	The limitations of our study include generalizability as our study population was a referred
428	population consisting of MGB patients evaluated by a specialist. The majority of our patients

were white females, which was likely a reflection of the overrepresentation of white females in
the healthcare worker population in the Boston area. The demographics may limit
generalizability across demographics although these demographics closely match those reported
nationally. ^{3,6,7} These data are subject to information bias as we do not know why some
individuals chose not to receive their second dose of the vaccine, even when the allergist advised
that it was safe to proceed. Given that proceeding to a second mRNA COVDI-19 vaccine dose
was not at random, we acknowledge that there is a bias in calculation of an NPV. However,
while NPV could be calculated given that only 9% of skin test negative patients did not receive
dose two, we were unable to calculate PPV given that 40% of skin test positive patients did not
receive dose two and sample size was just 5. Another limitation is that symptoms were self-
reported. Although we intended to only use excipient skin testing in high risk individuals, some
individuals reported minor and subjective symptoms (e.g. itch, globus, diziness); including these
symptoms in our analysis may have made it more difficult to ascertain the association of
excipient skin testing with true mRNA COVID-19 vaccine allergy. However, the inclusion of
these patients was due to patient preference and shared decision-making.
Overall, our initially published risk stratification protocol ¹³ allowed safe second dose mRNA
COVID-19 vaccination for the vast majority of individuals despite a reported first dose allergic
reaction. We have since learned that excipient skin testing may be of little utility in the
assessment of these reactions, particularly in individuals without anaphylaxis. More data are
needed to identify whether PEG skin prick testing after a reaction clinically consistent with
severe anaphylaxis to mRNA COVID vaccine is predictive of a reaction with subsequent mRNA
COVID-19 vaccine. Additional studies focusing on specific reaction phenotypes, notably
anaphylaxis, may enable us to better risk stratify and optimize our recommendations for

subsequent COVID-19 vaccination after immediate allergic reactions. As experiences
accumulate, similar to the revised algorithm included in this study, we will update our clinical
approach to provide up-to-date guidance for individuals with a presumed reaction to the first
dose of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

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- **Figure 1**: Patients who were skin tested due to symptoms after mRNA COVID-19 vaccination that were concerning for an allergic reaction. **A:** All patients. **B:** Patients with immediate allergic reactions. **C:** Patients with delayed allergic reactions
- *3 patients who had positive skin testing to both PEG and polysorbate are represented in the PEG
 category only in this figure.
- [†]1 patient did not receive the next dose in the series and instead received Janssen.
 - [‡]2 patients had a grade 0 reactions. 1 patient had a grade 1 reaction.
- 567 §3 patients had a grade 0 reaction. 9 patients had a grade 1 reaction, and 3 patients had a grade 2 reaction.
- 569 ¹2 patients who had positive skin testing to both PEG and polysorbate are represented in the PEG category only for the purpose of this figure.
- 571 ¶1 patient did not receive the next dose in the series and instead received Janssen.
- 572 #1 patient had a grade 0 reaction. 1 patient had a grade 1 reaction.
- 573 **2 patients had a grade 0 reaction. 8 patients had a grade 1 reaction. 3 patients had a grade 2 reaction.
- 575 ††1 patient who had positive skin testing to both PEG and polysorbate is represented in the PEG category only for the purpose of this figure.
- 577 ^{‡‡}1 patient had a grade 0 reaction.
- 578 §§1 patient had a grade 0 reaction. 1 patient had a grade 1 reaction.

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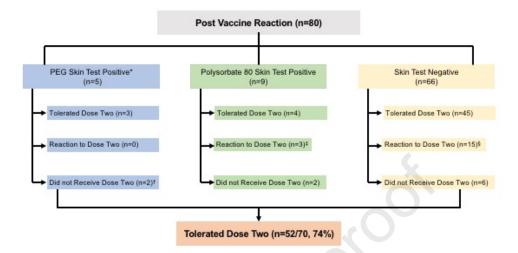
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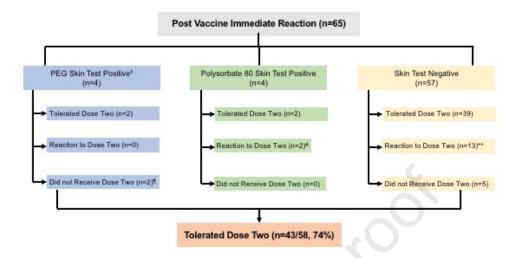
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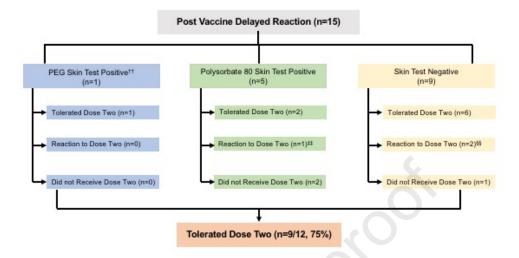
Figure 2: Management of patients who present with symptoms concerning for an allergic reaction to the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. Use of Janssen vaccine (if available) may be appropriate following allergic reaction to the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if allergy evaluation is not feasible or due to shared decision-making between patient and physician.

PEG3350 (Miralax)		
Step 1	1:100	
Epicutaneous	(1.7mg/mL)	
Step 2	1:10	
Epicutaneous	(17 mg/mL)	
Step 3	1:1	
Epicutaneous	(170 mg/mL)	

			PEG3350	Polysorbate 80 (Choose One)	
	PEG3350 (Miralax)		Miralax	Triamcinolone Acetonide (also contains carboxymethyl- cellulose)	Prevnar 13
Epicutaneous	1:100 (1.7mg/mL)	Step 1 Epicutan		40 mg/ml	1:10
		Step 2 Epicutan	1:10 (17 mg/mL)		
Epicutaneous	1:10 (17 mg/mL)	Step 3 Epicutan			Ç,
Epicutaneous	1:1	Step 4 Intrade	E C	0.4 mg/ml	1:100
Epicut	(170 mg/mL)	Step 5 Intrader		4 mg/ml	
		Step 5 Intrade		40 mg/ml	







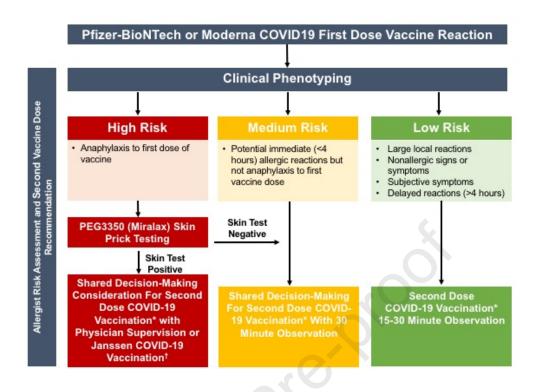


Table 1. Characteristics of patients that completed skin testing. All patients were referred for skin testing due to symptoms suggestive of an IgE reaction after the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

Characteristic	All (n=80)	Immediate Allergic Reaction* (n=65)	Delayed Allergic Reaction [†] (n=15)
Demographics			,
Age (mean, SD)	40.9 (±13.6)	42.4 (±12.4)	34.5 (±16.6)
Female Sex (n, %)	71 (89)	57 (88)	14 (93)
Race (n, %)	, ,	. ,	, ,
White	62 (78)	51 (79)	11 (73)
Asian	7 (9)	5 (8)	2(13)
Black or African American	4 (5)	3 (5)	1 (7)
Other	7 (9)	6 (9)	1 (7)
History of Atopy (n, %)	56 (70)	45 (69)	11 (73)
Food Allergy	29 (36)	24 (37)	5 (33)
Asthma	25 (31)	19 (29)	6 (40)
History of Anaphylaxis	22 (28)	17 (26) [‡]	5 (33)§
Allergic Rhinitis	20 (25)	15 (23)	5 (33)
History of Polysorbate Allergy	5 (6)	3 (5)	2 (13)
Atopic Dermatitis	4 (5)	3 (4.6)	1 (6.7)
History of PEG Allergy	2(3)	2(3)	0 (0)
Reaction History (n, %)			
Cutaneous Symptoms	65 (81)	51 (78)	14 (93)
Lower Respiratory Symptoms [¶]	18 (23)	14 (22)	4 (27)
Cardiovascular Symptoms #	11 (14)	10 (15)	1 (7)
Gastrointestinal Symptoms**	9 (11)	7 (11)	2 (13)
Upper Airway Symptoms ^{††}	6 (8)	6 (9)	0 (0)
Other Symptoms	51 (64)	21 (32) ‡‡	1 (7) §§
Management of Allergic Reaction (n, %)	`	. ,	,
Antihistamines	54 (68)	47 (72)	7 (47)
Corticosteroids	12 (15)	11 (17)	1 (7)
Epinephrine IM	6 (8)	6 (9)	0 (0)
Emergency Room Visit	19 (24)	18 (28)	1 (7)
Allergic Reaction to (n, %)			
Dose 1 (Moderna)	62 (78)	48 (74)	14 (93)
Dose 1 (Pfizer)	18 (23)	17 (26)	1 (7)
Ring and Messmer Criteria ¹⁷ (n, %)			
Grade 0	22 (28)	21 (32)	1 (7)
Grade 1	46 (58)	33 (51)	13 (87)
Grade 2	12 (15)	11 (17)	1 (7)
Positive Skin Test Results (n, %)	14 (18)	8 (65)	6 (40)
Miralax 1:100 (SPT)	1(1)	1 (2)	0 (0)

Miralax 1:10 (SPT)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Miralax 1:1 (SPT)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Depo-Medrol 0.4mg/mL (IDT)	3 (4)	2 (3)	1 (7)
Depo-Medrol 4mg/mL (IDT)	1 (1)	1 (2)	0 (0)
Refresh Eye Drops 1:1 (SPT)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Refresh Eye Drops 1:100 (IDT	10 (13)	5 (8)	5 (33)
Refresh Eye Drops 1:10 (IDT)	2(3)	1 (2)	1 (7)

^{*} Immediate was defined as 4 or fewer hours. 47 (72%) were within 1 hour, with a median of 10 minutes (IQR: 5,15)

Abbreviations: Coronavirus Disease-2019, COVID-19 Standard Deviation, SD; Polyethylene Glycol, PEG; Interquartile range, IQR; Skin prick test, SPT; intradermal test, IDT; Intramuscular, IM

[†] Delayed was defined as more than 4 hours. 11 (73%) were within 24 hours

[‡] Medication 9 (14), Food 6 (9), Venom 2 (3)

[§] Medication 3 (20), Food 2 (13)

Hives, rash, itching, swelling (not throat), flushing

Wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, cough

^{*}Tachycardia, hypotension

^{**} Gastrointestinal upset, diarrhea, vomiting, nausea

^{††} Throat swelling, hoarseness, globus

^{‡‡} Tingling (n=14, 22%), lightheaded (n=4, 6%), chest pain (n=1, 2%), feeling hot (n=1, 2%), and syncope (n=1, 2%), red eye (n=1, 2%). Patients may have more than one symptom.

^{§§} Sneezing (n=1, 7%), tingling (n=1, 7%). Patients may have more than one symptom.

Table 2. Patients with positive skin testing results. Clinical characteristics, details of first dose reaction, skin testing result, and details of second dose for patients with positive skin testing results.

				History	8		Dose C	ne Reaction				
	Age	Sex	Allergies or Allergic Reaction	Prior History of Anaphylaxis	Vaccine	Onset of Symptoms	Signs and Symptoms	Treatment	Treatment Setting/ Disposition	Ring and Messmer Grade	Skin Test Results	Dose Two Outcome
	46	F	Hymenoptera venom	Yes: Hymenoptera venom	Moderna	0.16 hour	Dizziness, nausea, difficulty swallowing, swelling of eyes and tongue, hives	Diphenhydramine	Home	1	Methyl- prednisolone Acetate IDT 4 mg/ml (10x14mm) Refresh IDT 1:10 (9x21mm)	Tolerated Janssen.
Reaction	40	F	None	No	Pfizer	0.16 hour	tongue itching,	Diphenhydramine, IV fluids, epinephrine IM, methyl-prednisolone succinate, ondansetron.	Emergency Department	1	Miralax SPT 1:100 (6x25mm)	Recommended to not receive dose two.
Immediate (<4 hour) Reaction	26	F	Ginger	No	Moderna	0.25 hour	Wheezing	No treatment needed	Home	2	Methyl- prednisolone Acetate IDT 0.4 mg/ml (16x44mm)	Tolerated Moderna
Immed	56	F	Omalizumab, cefaclor, sulfonamide antibiotics, nuts, shellfish, latex	No	Moderna	0.3 hour	Stinging in eyes, tingling of the tongue and lips, mild itching	Cetirizine, famotidine	Home	0	Refresh IDT 1:100 (8x11mm)	Pretreated with cetirizine 10mg and prednisone 20mg. 5 minutes after receiving dose two (Moderna), patient experienced pruritus. Treated with cetirizine 20mg.
	49	F	None	No	Moderna	1 hour	Flushing, hives, itching	Fexofenadine	Home	1	Refresh IDT (5x15mm)	Tolerated Moderna.

	26	F	Environmental	No	Moderna	3 hours	Wheezing, chest tightness, dry cough	Albuterol	Home	2	Methyl- prednisolone Acetate IDT 0.4 mg/ml (10x20mm)	Tolerated Moderna.
											Refresh IDT 1:100 (8x18mm)	
	54	M	None	No	Moderna	3 hours	Itching, lip swelling	No treatment needed	Home	1	Refresh IDT 1:100 (9x21mm)	4-6 hours after receiving dose two (Moderna), patient experienced lip swelling, which self-resolved.
	42	F	Penicillin, hymenoptera venom	No	Moderna	4 hours	Hives	No treatment needed	Home	1	Refresh IDT 1:100 (6x24mm)	Tolerated Moderna
	28	F	None	No	Moderna	10-12 hours	Itching, hives	No treatment needed	Home	1	Refresh IDT 1:100 (4x12mm)	Awaiting vaccination
	29	F	Penicillin	No	Moderna	12-16 hours	Palpitations, diarrhea, delayed hives	Loperamide	Home	0	Refresh IDT 1:100 (7x18mm)	Tolerated Moderna.
Reaction	33	F	None	No	Moderna	12-24 hours	Diffuse hives	Diphenhydramine	Home	1	Refresh IDT 1:100 (10x40mm)	Tolerated Moderna.
Delayed (>4 hour) Reaction	24	F	Environmental	No	Moderna	18-24 hours	Wheezing, chest tightness, hives, itching	Diphenhydramine, topical hydrocortisone	Home	1	Methyl- prednisolone Acetate IDT 0.4 mg/ml (9x22mm) Refresh IDT	Tolerated Moderna.
											1:100 (13x32mm)	
	49	F	None	No	Pfizer	20 hours	Tongue swelling, sneezing, nasal congestion, itchy eyes, chest	Diphenhydramine, Acetaminophen, Pseudoephedrine	Home	1	Refresh IDT 1:100 (12x20mm)	Patient preference to not receive dose 2.

						congestion, cough, swelling of fingers				
19	F	Peanut, tree	Yes: peanut,	Moderna	48 hours		Diphenhydramine	Home		Pretreated with
		nuts	tree nut			closing"			1:10 (11x17mm)	
										and prednisone
										20mg. 20
										minutes after
							C			receiving dose
										two (Moderna),
										patient
							40			experienced
										dizziness,
										numbness in legs
										and fingers,
							7			warm feeling in
										throat. Treated
										with cetirizine
										10mg.

Table 3. Patients with negative skin testing results but reported a reaction to dose two. Clinical characteristics, details of first dose reaction and details of second dose reaction for patients with negative skin testing results who developed a reaction to dose two. *Ring and Messmer Grade. ¹³

			Allergies			Dose Or	ne Reaction			Dose Tv	vo Reaction	
	Age	Sex	or Allergic Reaction	Vaccine	Onset of Symptoms	Signs and Symptoms	Treatment and Treatment Setting	Grade*	Onset of Symptoms	Signs and Symptoms	Treatment and Treatment Setting	Grade*
no	29	F	Cefuroxime, sulfonamide antibiotics, clindamycin, iodinated contrast media, ketoconazole, moxifloxacin, nystatin	Moderna	0 hours	Dizziness, fatigue, hives	Levocetirizine and diphenhydramine at home		0.2 hours	Hives	Diphenhydramine at the vaccine clinic and cetirizine, famotidine, and prednisone at home	1
Immediate (<4 hours) Reaction	62	F	Sulfon- amide antibiotics, latex, loratadine, morphine	Moderna	0.1 hours	Lip tingling, dizziness, eye and facial swelling	No treatment was sought	1	0.5 hours	Itching of ear, eye swelling	Diphenhydramine at the vaccine clinic and prednisone at home	1
Immediate (56	M	No known allergies	Pfizer	0.1 hours	Tongue tingling, lower lip swelling, mild throat clearing	Epinephrine, diphenhydramine, solumedrol at the emergency department	1	0.1 hours	Lower lip swelling	Cetirizine at home	1
	47	F	Latex, tramadol, amoxicillin , sulfameth- oxazole- trimetho- prim, flucona- zole	Moderna	0.1 hours	Itching, lip tingling, subjective lip and tongue swelling, hive-like rash	Diphenhydramine at the vaccine clinic and loratadine and cetirizine at home	1	12 hours	Eye swelling and itching	Loteprednol and cetirizine at home	1
	56	F	Shrimp,	Moderna	0.1 hours	Generalized	Diphenhydramine at	0	0.2 hours	Itching,	Diphenhydramine at	0

		nitofuran- toin, ibuprofen, sulfamex- thoxazole- trimetho- prim			itching, throat itchiness, fatigue	the emergency department and albuterol at home			headache, throat tightness and itching, warmth, flushing	the emergency department	
57	F	No known allergies	Moderna	0.1 hours	Headache, throat tightness, fatigue, hypertension , redness on legs, joint and muscle aches, shakes	Ibuprofen and unspecified antihistamine at home		12-24 hours	Itching, rash, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, fatigue, fever, cough, muscle aches, and joint pain	Acetaminophen and diphenhydramine at home	1
46	F	Pepper, procaine	Moderna	0.2 hours	Tingling of left arm, roof of mouth, and tongue, numbness.	Cetirizine at the emergency department	0	0 hours	Numbness, chest tightness, dry heaving, chills, hot sensation in lips	Diphenhydramine, ondansetron, and methylprednisolone at the emergency department	0
24	F	Amoxicillin, clindamycin, pineapple, benzonatate	Moderna	0.25 hours	Globus and throat itching, cough, erythemat- ous oropharynx, hoarse voice	Epinephrine, methylprednisolone sodium succinate, and diphenhydramine at the emergency department	2	0.6 hours	Throat tightness and itching, cough, erythematou s posterior pharynx, watery eyes	Cetirizine, albuterol, and epinephrine at the vaccine clinic and methylprednisolone sodium succinate, diphenhydramine, and famotidine at the emergency department	2
29	F	MMR vaccine, penicillin	Pfizer	0.3 hours	Hives, cough, hoarseness	Epinephrine, prednisone, and cetirizine at the emergency department	2	0.3 hours	Itching, rash, hives, throat tightness, cough	Epinephrine, cetirizine, and albuterol at the emergency department	2
58	F	Ciproflox-	Moderna	0.5 hours	Lip tingling,	No treatment was	1	12 hours	Lip tingling,	Unspecified	1

			acin, cephalex- in, macrolide antibiotics, NSAIDs, omepra- zole, penicillin, theophyll- ine, codeine			eye, lip, facial, and leg swelling, throat tightness	sought	Š,		lip swelling, sensation of facial swelling	antihistamine at home	
	59	F	Succinyl- choline, midazolam, prometha- zine, gabapentin, fentanyl, prochlor- perazine, cefazolin	Pfizer	1.25 hours	Sensation of throat closing, dysphagia, shortness of breath, itching of palms, soles, and torso	Diphenhydramine at the vaccine clinic	0	0.3 hours	Face, neck, and chest flushing, itching over palms and feet, lip fullness and tingling	Diphenhydramine at the vaccine clinic	1
	43	F	Ibuprofen, penicillin	Pfizer	2 hours	Lip swelling, full body itching, facial swelling, headache	Acetaminophen at home	1	0.75 hours	Tongue numbness, hive-like rash, wheezing	No treatment was sought	2
	43	F	No known allergies	Moderna	2-3 hours	Itchy rash on right arm, red and itchy right eye	No treatment was sought	1	0.1 hours	Chest flushing	No treatment was sought	1
nr	37	F	Cephal- osporins,	Moderna	8.5 hours	Hives, eye and lip	Diphenhydramine and loratadine at	1	0.25 hours	Arm and neck itching,	Cetirizine in the vaccine clinic	0

6	2 F	penicillin, shellfish, latex, bee sting, influenza vaccine Iodine, shellfish	Moderna	10 hours	Hives, nausea, diarrhea	Unspecified anti-	1	Unknown	arm erythema Throat, tongue, and eye	No treatment was sought	1
						Ċ	KOO		swelling, itching of chest and face, nausea, headache, lethargy		

Figure E1: Skin testing protocol for PEG using Miralax for epicutaneous testing without PEG intradermal testing and PEG and polysorbate 80.

Table E1: Skin testing protocols used in the manuscript to test for PEG and polysorbate 80 allergy. Refresh Tears, which contains polysorbate 80 0.5%, was subsequently found to be irritating. Triamcinolone acetonide contains polysorbate 80 0.04%. Some brands of methylprednisolone acetate contain polysorbate and PEG3350 while others only have PEG3350;

methylprednisolone acetate containing PEG3350 only.

Drug	SPT	ID (mg/mL)
	(mg/mL)	
PEG-3350		1
Miralax	1.7	
	17	
	170	
Methyl-	40	0.4
prednisolone		4
acetate*		
Control		
Methyl-	40	0.4
prednisolone		4
sodium		
succinate		
Polysorbate 80		
Triamcinolone	40	0.4
acetonide		4
		40
Refresh Tears	1:1	1:10

Table E2: Ring and Messmer Grading for allergic reactions.²¹

Grade 1	: Cutaneous Signs
Urticaria	a
Angioed	lema
Generali	ized Erythema
Grade 2	2: Measurable but not life-threatening symptoms
Cutaneo	us signs
Hypoten	asion (defined as a decrease of more than 30% in blood pressure
with tacl	hycardia)

Cough
Difficulty with mechanical ventilation
Grade 3: Life-threatening symptoms
Cardiovascular collapse
Tachycardia or bradycardia (due to not include mild sinus tachycardia)
Arrhythmias
Severe bronchospasm
Grade 4: Death
Cardiac arrest
Respiratory arrest

Table E3: Refresh Tears skin testing results on non-allergic, clinically tolerant controls, reflecting a high frequency of false positive, irritant reactions. Among 25 non-allergic controls, there were 13 (52%) positive reactions to Refresh Tears on intradermal testing, with 8 (32%) positive at the 1:100 concentration and 5 (20%) positive at the 1:10 concentration

	Refresh Tears 1:100	Refresh Tears 1:10
Patient	(ID) (mm, wheal x flare)	(ID) (mm, wheal x flare)
1	10 x 20	<u> </u>
2	0	7 x 15
3	0	8 x 18
4	0	0
5	8 x 18	
6	9 x 14	
7	0	0
8	0	0
9	0	0
10	0	0
11	8 x 13	
12	0	0
13	9 x 20	
14	0	7 x 18
15	0	0
16	0	
17	0	

18	0	6 x 24
19	0	0
20	0	0
21	0	0
22	8 x18	
23	7 x 8	
24	0	4 x 8
25	5 x 10	
Total:	8 (32%)	5 (20%)