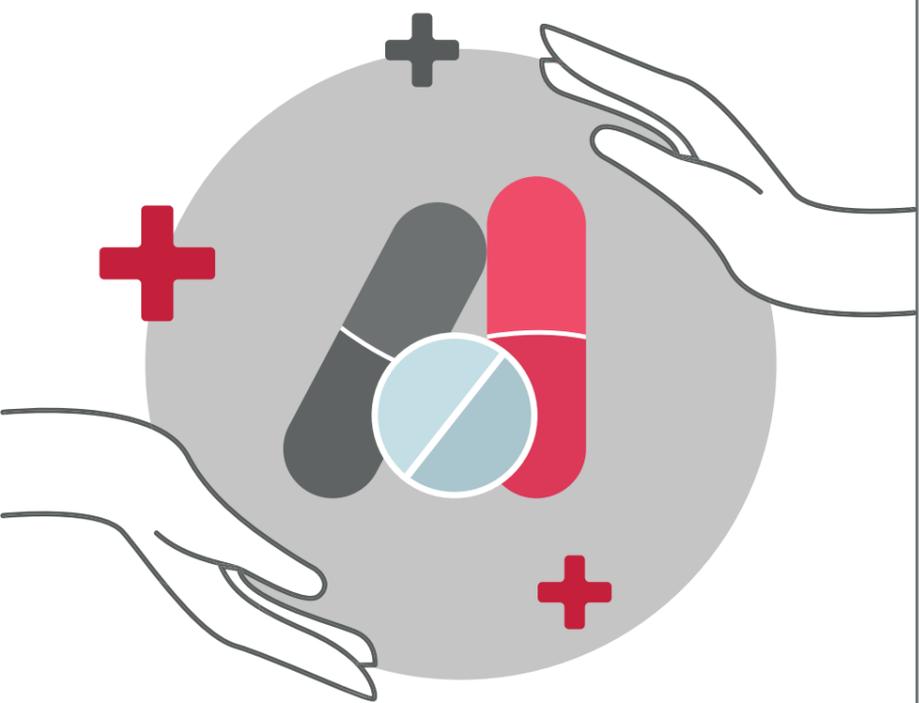


# ADVANTAGE

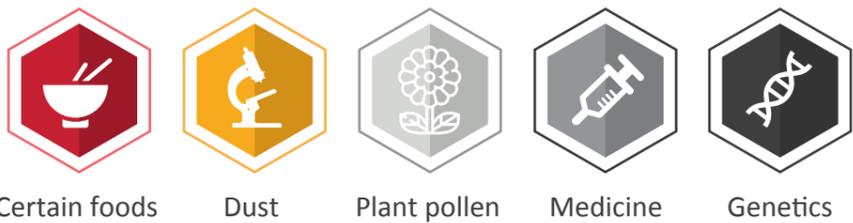
## Allergies

If you have any concerns about whether your plan covers the subject matter discussed in Advantage, please contact your NMG Benefits Healthcare Advisor.

September | 2017



### Causes of Allergies



### Symptoms

- Hay fever, coughing, sneezing
- Conjunctivitis
- Eczema
- Anaphylaxis – fatal unless treated immediately

### Treatment



## Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

### 1 What is an allergy?

An allergy, or allergic reaction, is a condition in which the immune system reacts abnormally to a foreign substance. The immune system normally protects us against harmful bacteria, viruses, and other organisms, and all these are called antigens. However, during an allergy attack the body reacts as if one of these organisms, or other harmful substance, is invading the body, when that is not the case. Allergies affect all age groups, and even though the reaction tends to be the same, the triggers are different. The reaction can be immediate (immediate hypersensitivity, or delayed (delayed hypersensitivity).

### 2 What causes allergies?

Substances that cause allergic reactions such as certain foods, dust, plant pollen, or medicines are known as allergens. When the body is exposed to an allergen (or antigen) it produces antibodies, which target and destroy the foreign substance. The antibodies do this by initiating chemical reactions, which include the production of a substance called histamine, and it is histamine which is responsible for the symptoms one experiences.

### 3 What are the risk factors?

Allergies can begin at any age and it is possible for some people to outgrow their allergies. Food and environmental allergies are dependent on exposure to the offending allergens. Genetics can play a role in the development of allergies as people whose parents have allergies are known to be at a higher risk. It is also known that being born via caesarian section, exposure to cigarette smoke, and excessive air pollution increase one's risk.

### 4 What are the common symptoms and types?

These vary from person to person, and are also dependent on the severity of the reaction. Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, is the most common allergic condition, and it can occur throughout the year or during specific seasons. Other types include conjunctivitis (allergy of the eyes) and eczema. It is worth noting that asthma is also a form of allergy. The most extreme version an allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis, which can be fatal if not treated immediately. The following are some of the common symptoms:

- Sneezing and wheezing
- nasal congestion
- coughing
- itchy, watery eyes and a runny nose
- itchy throat / itchy skin hives

### 5 What is the diagnosis and treatment?

Diagnosis is mainly based on the history you provide to the health professional. In addition to this, a skin prick test is often performed which can be combined with blood tests. Eczema can be diagnosed on physical examination, and lung function tests are performed to confirm the diagnosis of asthma.

Having allergies cannot be prevented if one has a genetic predisposition. It is however possible to prevent allergic reactions. The first line of treatment is to identify the triggering allergen and to avoid being exposed to it if possible. For a severe reaction, antihistamines are prescribed, and these can be administered through the eyes, nose, mouth, or they can be applied on the skin, depending on the specific symptoms. In more severe cases, steroids and other more potent drugs are added. Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency and should be treated in a facility that has the necessary services and expertise. With the correct diagnosis and prompt initiation of relevant treatment patient with allergies do well.