Sublingual immunotherapy; Questions and Answers

What kinds of allergen sensitivities can be treated with sublingual immunotherapy?

The same allergen sensitivities as are treated with injections can be treated with drops - pollens, mites, molds, dander, and other environmental allergens. One significant difference between formulation types is that molds can be included with other ingredients in the formulation for drops without negatively affecting the integrity of the other allergens.

What are the ingredients in Heska's Immucept Sublingual Allergy Treatment?

As with injection immunotherapy, allergens for sublingual immunotherapy are selected based on serum or intradermal testing following establishment of a clinical diagnosis of atopic dermatitis. The principles for choosing allergens to include in drops are the same as used in the choice of allergens for shots, including history of exposure, cross-reactivity, and empirical observations on the significance of particular allergens in relation to others. However, the formulation for sublingual immunotherapy is different than that for injection immunotherapy. The specific formulation and preparation is proprietary, and has been assessed for safety and efficacy in a multicentre study.

Why aren't more pets treated with sublingual immunotherapy?

Although sublingual immunotherapy has been used successfully in humans for more than 50 years, it is a relatively new treatment option in the veterinary field. Efficacy of sublingual immunotherapy depends on antigen choice, treatment set vehicle and preparation, and the protocol for dosing administration and frequency. The formulation used in Immucept injectable was developed based on a unique, time-tested protocol used successfully for decades in human allergy patients. The formulation was modified for veterinary use, and efficacy approximately equivalent to that seen with sublingual was observed in trials involving several hundred dogs across many geographic locations having a myriad of allergen sensitivities.

What are the advantages of sublingual immunotherapy?

The main advantage of sublingual immunotherapy is ease of administration. For many pet owners, giving an injection is not something with which they are comfortable. Most dogs accept the highly palatable drops easily, and many may even view it as a treat. There might be some side effects with, and those that do occur are mild and transient. Dogs that have not responded to subcutaneous immunotherapy have a good chance of responding to sublingual immunotherapy (multicentre study),

due at least in part to the different mechanism of action between the two different routes of administration. Heska Immucept is to be stored at room temperature.

What is the treatment protocol for Sublingual immunotherapy?
Just as with subcutaneous immunotherapy, there is a gradual increase in allergen concentration with sublingual immunotherapy. With Heska Immucept Sublingual, patients will start with bottle A and use the entire contents before moving on to bottle B, and then finally to bottle C, which is the maintenance concentration. The drops are given at a dose of two pumps twice daily under the tongue. Ideally, the allergen solution should remain in contact with the oral mucosa as long as possible. Drops should not be mixed with food or treats, and the patient should not have food, treats, or water for about 10 minutes after dosing.

Why do Heska Immucept need to be given twice a day, every day?
Twice daily dosing is a very important facet of sublingual immunotherapy, as frequent and regular stimulation of the cells that promote tolerance to allergens is essential for successful efficacy.

What happens if a dose is missed?
If a dose is missed, the next dose should be given on schedule, as usual. There is no need to give extra doses to "catch up," and giving too much at once may actually cause a reaction. If multiple doses are missed, again, just continue on the same schedule, but note that the dispensing pump may have to be primed to ensure the proper volume is delivered.

How long after starting treatment with sublingual immunotherapy can results be expected?
Each allergy patient's condition is unique; however, many patients will experience some alleviation of symptoms within the first 1 to 3 months after treatment starts. It is recommended that treatment be continued for at least 10 months before deciding whether or not it is beneficial to the pet.

When can the sublingual treatment be discontinued?
It is possible, after successful achievement of full resolution of allergic symptoms over an extended period of time using ALLERCEPT Therapy Drops, that some pets may be able to eventually stop drop treatment and still maintain good control over their allergic disease. However, there is not yet data available to make this claim.

Are there side-effects from sublingual immunotherapy?

Side effects are very rare and most often are limited to some mild itching or irritation inside the mouth, indicated by the animal rubbing or pawing at its mouth/muzzle. This is typically a very mild reaction, usually lasting for only 5 to 10 minutes, and resolving within the first 1 to 2 weeks of treatment. Occasional vomiting has been observed in a very low percentage of dogs for the first few doses, also resolving within the first week(s) of treatment.
It is possible with very sensitive animals that worsening of clinical signs can occur with sublingual administration. In these cases, an adjustment to the drop formulation and/or administered dose should be considered. Anaphylaxis is extremely rare in humans, and the same appears to be true in dogs based on experience thus far. It is recommended that the pet owner contact their veterinarian prior to administering the next dose should they see any type of reaction.

If a patient has side effects, is sublingual form no longer an option?
Occurrence of side effects does not necessarily mean that sublingual is not a good immunotherapy treatment option, especially if the reaction is mild. If a stronger reaction is observed, an adjustment to the formulation or administered dose may be recommended.

Will sublingual form work if injectable did not?
Potentially. There is no single treatment that works for all allergic patients. In clinical studies, some dogs that either did not improve or had a severe reaction with injectable immunotherapy were able to tolerate the sublingual form and had a favorable response in alleviation of their allergy symptoms. This is likely due at least in part to the different mechanism of action between the two forms.