

Children's services

# Extravasation injury in children

## Information for parents

### Introduction

This leaflet explains what extravasation injury is and how to treat it. Please feel free to ask our team any questions you have about the information below.

### What is extravasation injury?

Extravasation is the accidental leakage of certain medicines outside of the vein and into the surrounding tissues.

Your child may have noticed pain, stinging, swelling or other changes to their skin at the site where they are given drugs or the nurse may have noticed that the drug was not flowing in easily.

Some medicines, such as aciclovir, can cause damage when they escape from the drip or the vein. The symptoms can vary from blisters to severe tissue injury and can even cause the cells or tissue to die.

### What causes an extravasation injury?

Children have small veins which can be fragile and more at risk of extravasation. Medicine can come into contact with the surrounding tissue by leakage or direct exposure. The device that gives the medicine may be the incorrect size or may be placed on an area that moves a lot so it becomes loose or dislodged. The cannula (the flexible tube) may puncture the vein and the medicine then goes into the surrounding tissue, or the same vein may be used multiple times, which weakens it.

### What are the signs and symptoms of extravasation injuries?

Symptoms of an extravasation injury can include:

- coolness or blanching (lightening of the skin) at the medicine insertion site
- swelling
- tenderness/discomfort
- taut or stretched skin
- leakage of fluid at the insertion site
- inability to obtain blood return (not always present)
- change in quality and flow of the infusion or injection
- numbness, tingling or a pins and needles feeling
- burning, stinging pain
- redness may occur followed by blistering, tissue breakdown and ulceration

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## How is an extravasation injury normally diagnosed?

Sometimes, other conditions will need to be ruled out first. Some symptoms can resemble other conditions, such as vessel irritation or hypersensitivity (highly sensitive). However, as extravasation injuries can be very serious, a nurse or doctor will always be extra cautious and follow the correct treatment for an extravasation injury.

## How is an extravasation injury treated?

Extravasation injuries are considered to be medical emergencies. Early detection of the condition is best to avoid complications.

Immediate treatment will be to stop the flow of medicine and review the possible injury caused. Depending on the level of injury caused, a plastic surgeon may come and examine the injury. The cannula may be left in place in case there is a need to give any treatment or medicine.

The affected site will be raised and monitored for any changes. A hot or cold compress may be placed on the injury and it may be gently washed out with saline and a dressing applied.

## What happens next?

The injury will be observed and raised until it regains a normal appearance. Occasionally, surgical reconstruction by a plastic surgeon is necessary.

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

Please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3313 0088 (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or 020 3312 7777 (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at [pals@imperial.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@imperial.nhs.uk). Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please contact the communications team on 020 3312 5592.

We have a free and premium wi-fi service at each of our five hospitals. For further information please visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

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