

What to do after an extravasation of radiology contrast media

Information for patients

This leaflet explains what an extravasation injury is, and the care needed if it happens while you receive contrast media through an injection in your radiology examination. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak to your radiology team.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you do not have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we do not ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is radiology contrast media?

Contrast media is a clear liquid that is injected through a thin plastic tube (cannula) inserted into your vein. It acts like a 'dye' which helps to show up any problems in the organs of the body.

Contrast media is used to increase the amount of information we can find out about your body during your test. Millions of radiology studies are performed with the use of contrast media each year.

What is extravasation?

Extravasation is the leakage (or accidental infiltration) of the contrast media outside of the vein and into the tissues around the vein. It occurs in roughly 1 in 1,000 radiology patients.

You may notice pain, stinging, swelling or other changes to the skin at the site of the injection. This may last for a few days and occasionally results in local tissue damage.

Although this may be an uncomfortable experience, damage is not long-term for most patients. However, for a very small number of patients there can be further complications.

What are the signs and symptoms of contrast extravasation?

- Swelling.
- Tenderness or discomfort.
- Taut or stretched skin.
- Leakage of fluid at the insertion site.
- Change in quality and flow of the infusion or injection.
- Numbness, tingling or a pins and needles feeling.
- Burning, stinging pain.
- Redness or discolouration of skin may occur followed by blisters, tissue breakdown and ulceration.

What treatment will I receive to prevent tissue damage?

The radiology team will give you the recommended treatment for extravasation as soon as it is noticed. This includes:

- stopping the injection of contrast media and assessing the injury
- removing the cannula
- raising the affected area where possible
- applying a cold compress

The radiology team may need to insert another cannula to complete your examination. They will contact you within a week to check your progress.

What can I do at home?

- Raise the affected area if possible and gently exercise the affected arm or hand (keep your fingers moving to improve blood flow).
- Apply a warm compress to the area four times over the first 24 hours (15 minutes each time).
- Take mild pain killers if needed.
- Do not apply lotions, creams or ointments unless you have been instructed by radiology staff to do so. If you were given a cream in department, follow the instructions supplied.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing around the affected area and gently pat the site dry after washing.

What do I need to look out for?

In most cases, this is a minor injury and does not need any further treatment. However, if you experience any of the following symptoms, you should seek advice from your GP or attend your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) and take this leaflet with you:

- the pain becomes more severe and is not controlled by simple painkillers
- there is increased swelling of the arm or hand
- the arm or hand changes in colour
- there are pins and needles or altered sensation in the arm or hand
- there is blistering or ulceration of the skin around the injection site

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.mychart@nhs.net. To find out more visit www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: 020 3299 4618
Email: kings.pals@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net