

## Information sheet for patients who have had an intravenous injection of contrast medium

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

You have been given an injection of contrast into a vein to enhance your CT (Computed Tomography) scan or x-ray examination. Contrast is commonly described as a 'dye' as it allows veins, arteries and internal organs to show up more clearly on scan images. Although it is described as a dye, contrast is actually colourless to the eye and is removed naturally from your body through your bladder when you go to the toilet.

**You will be asked to stay in the department for 30 minutes afterwards and not to leave the hospital or drive for an hour following the procedure to make sure there are no after effects.**

**You should drink plenty of fluid after your examination to flush the 'dye' out of your system.**

### What are the possible effects from receiving an injection of contrast?

The 'dye' used for CT scans and x-rays contains iodine which can cause a mild allergic reaction during the injection such as itching, wheezing or nausea. These reactions rarely occur, but when they do, they normally pass off very quickly – usually within five to 10 minutes of the injection.

In the radiology department, it is standard practice for a member of staff to go through a checklist with you before the dye is given so that any conditions you have which might cause a potential reaction to the dye can be identified. However, even when no conditions are identified, it is still possible that some people may experience a reaction.

Any reaction to the dye is normally immediate, but occasionally a red, itchy rash can develop on the body some hours after the scan. This is very rare, but if it does happen, you should contact your GP or local A&E department.

Other rare but possible delayed reactions include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation, abdominal pain, pain in the injected arm, rash, dizziness and headache.

These signs and symptoms almost always disappear within a few hours and usually little or no treatment is required.

**However, if problems persist or you have any concerns, you should contact your GP or nearest A&E department.**

## **Are there any other possible complications?**

In some circumstances, the 'dye' has to be injected into the arm quite quickly at the start of the examination. Sometimes the dye can leak into the fatty tissue around the vein during the injection. This is called 'extravasation'.

Extravasation happens very rarely, but if it does occur, the area of your arm around the injection site may feel sore and swollen. The staff will explain to you if this has happened and you will be advised to:

- keep gently massaging the area
- keep your arm raised up (if possible) and apply a cold compress

The swelling should clear within 24 hours of the event.

## **Follow up**

If you continue to have pain, discomfort or swelling around the injection site up to one week after your examination and you are concerned, you should get the injection site checked by your GP.

In rare cases, further treatment of the site is needed. Symptoms to watch for are:

- ongoing pain
- swelling
- discoloration
- redness, including redness that goes up your arm

## **Further information**

**If problems persist, you should contact your local GP or nearest A&E department.**

## **References**

### **MEDSCAPE Contrast Medium Reactions**

Author: Nasir H Siddiqi, MD; Chief Editor: Eugene C Lin, MD

### **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple  
Devon EX31 4JB  
Tel. 01271 322577  
[www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk)

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.  
Tel: 01271 313970 / email: [ndht.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.contactus@nhs.net)