

Patient Safety ALERT – Risk of severe harm or death when desmopressin is omitted or delayed in patients with cranial diabetes insipidus

- **Cranial diabetes insipidus is a very rare condition, requiring prompt treatment with desmopressin (also known as ‘DDAVP’).**
- Cranial diabetes insipidus is caused by damage to parts of the brain (the hypothalamus or pituitary gland), resulting in the inability of the body to produce antidiuretic hormone (ADH).
- **If left untreated, patients with cranial diabetes insipidus will start to produce large volumes of dilute urine and will develop life-threatening dehydration, hypernatraemia / electrolyte imbalance, resulting in critical illness or death.**
- **Symptoms of untreated diabetes insipidus can include confusion, agitation, hostile and un-cooperative behaviour, which increases the risk of desmopressin being omitted, as the patient is unable to communicate the nature of their condition and the need for prompt treatment.**
- Known patients have the flag “**DIAB INSIP. REV URG DESMO**” on their patient record, to alert clinicians to the diagnosis, prompt urgent clinical review and consideration for treatment with desmopressin. These flags will be moved to the patient’s Electronic Health Record with TrackCare.
- Desmopressin can be administered in a number of different routes, and formulations including:
 - Injection
 - Nasal spray
 - Orally as tablets, including sub-lingual or liquid
- **It is vitally important, even if the patient is ‘Nil By Mouth’ or refuses treatment due to acute illness, that the patient is clinically assessed and that desmopressin treatment is not inadvertently omitted.**
- A ‘Do’s’ of DI Management awareness leaflet is available on **Bob**, in the **Quality Improvement - [Patient Safety Alerts \(NDHT\)](#)** section – with this alert.

FOR ACTION:

- ✓ **Ensure ALL STAFF are aware that cranial diabetes insipidus requires prompt treatment with desmopressin (DDAVP);**
- ✓ **Even when a patient is ‘Nil By Mouth’ or refuses treatment due to acute illness, ensure that the patient is clinically assessed so that desmopressin treatment is not inadvertently omitted;**
- ✓ **Newly diagnosed patients with diabetes insipidus also need to be flagged on Trackcare** – which can be requested by calling the IT Service Desk Team (tel: 0300 123 1722); please provide the following information:
 - You are requesting a PAS flag for diabetes insipidus (DIABINSIP) for your patient
 - The patient name or date of birth
 - The Northern Devon patient number or NHS number